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OR TURNING DOWN

THE BIG THREE

A STORY OF WIPING OUT THE
HOLE-IN-THE WALL WOLVES.

BY WM. PERRY BROWN.
AUTHOR OF "BROOKLYN BOB'S BULGE," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A COUNTRY LAD IN NEW YORK CITY.

A GOOD-LOOKING, keen eyed lad of seven-
teen years was walking along one of the
lower residence streets in New York City

RUBE WAS UP IN A MOMENT AND LIGHTING A TAPER FOUND THE DOOR, WHICH
HE SUCCEEDED IN OPENING.

one night about the hour of dusk. He was clad in the blue uniform of a city messenger boy, and his general air and manner were at once alert and confident.

The high, old-fashioned houses there had steep roofs, with dormer windows and tall steps of stone, that were iron railed. There were areas, also railed in, and windowed basements.

Suddenly the front door of one of these houses was opened and a boy was violently pushed out. Then the door suddenly closed and the messenger boy heard the lock snap as the key was turned on the inside. The strength of the push sent the boy scurrying down the steps and bumped him against the messenger, who slewed him around and steadied him on his feet.

"Hello, country!" cried the blue-clad lad. "Take a hold on yourself! Is that the way you generally come out doors?"

"N-no. He—he choked me, then he give me a push," stammered the other boy, whose garb and air were decidedly rustic. "Durn it all! What am I going to do?"

"First thing, suppose you stand aside and let me get on. Got a message for the Equitable, ninth story. So long, 'country! Better skip back to your mother!"

"Say! See here. Uncle Eben has just turned me out without a cent. I never was in New York afore. Durn it all! Can't you tell a feller where he can git to stay to-night? If you was down my way in old Mizzoury, I'd 'a' asked you to stay all night without airy a hint!"

"Well, you are a jay!" the messenger boy laughed. "Go chase yourself around the block. If you don't make up your mind to try Uncle Eben again, there is a police station on the next street."

The city lad then neatly dodged the other and sped away at a half-trot, regardless of the entreaties sent after him by the country lad, who, indeed, appeared to be at his wits' end with fear and bewilderment. He stood on the pavement for some time, debating within himself as to his best course.

Finally he walked around to an alley that ran from one street to another at the rear of the houses. Halting at a back-yard gate, he peered through a knot-hole in the fence.

The rear windows of the house were all closed except one, though the night was warm. This was an upper one. A dim light, as of a candle, shone here, and the form of a young girl was flitting about within.

"Jennie said she was going to the grocery," muttered the boy to himself. "I wish she would come on. She don't know that I am fired. I would like to let her know. Perhaps she might tell me where to go. That blue-dressed feller is like all the rest here. No one don't care for any one but hisself, as far as I can see. Hello! I reckon Jennie must be coming. I'll get back to the front door."

As he slipped out of the alley a heavily-built, shabby-looking man dodged behind an ash barrel until the boy had passed. Then he slouched up the alley and peered through the same aperture by the gate through which the boy had looked.

Meanwhile, the latter, hurrying around, met a girl of fourteen descending the steps, with a basket on her arm.

"Oh, Jennie!" cried the Missouri lad, running up to her. "Uncle Eben turned me out. He wouldn't let me stay, nor give me any money, and now I don't know what to do. Can't you—you loan me a quarter to get a place to stay all night?"

The girl looked at him suspiciously. His coarse, ill-fitting clothing, his awkward manner and total unfamiliarity with city ways, were not prepossessing to a sharp city-bred girl of her stamp.

"Your name is Rube Rawlins, you say?" she asked.

"Right you are. Rube Rawlins, from Pike County, Mizzoury, own nephew to Eben Rawlins, of New York city. But Uncle Eben don't seem to believe me, though I told him all about father, who is dead. Father and Uncle Eben came from Vermont. Father went West, where I was borned. Un. Eben went to New York, where we heard he made a sight of money."

"You mustn't believe all you hear. Mr. Rawlins is mighty close. He don't pay me more than half what he ought, for I cooks, sweeps, and makes beds, and runs errands, and does all the marketin.' How does he know you are his nephew?"

"Why, I told him so. I told him, too, about father's dying in the Hannibal poor-house, and telling me to come to New York. 'Uncle Eben will give you a lift,' said he, 'for my sake.' But Uncle won't have nothing to do with me, and all my money is gone, and I don't know what in the nation will become of me. 'Deed, I don't!"

"Well, what is all this to me?" demanded Jennie, with some rudeness.

"Nothing, much; only—I—I thought, if I had that quarter, I wouldn't have to go to the police for a place to sleep."

"That is what I call nerve." Jennie's red lip curled, then Rube's drooping, helpless air suddenly appealed to her pity. "But, after all, you don't look fit to be out in these streets by yourself. Here is a dime and a nickel. I ain't got no quarter—that is, of my own. The old man gives me just enough to buy what we eat, and he sees to it that I don't waste a cent. Now skip, Rube—if that is your name. I'm in a hurry."

Jennie was off like a flash. Reuben looked at his windfall, then hurried away in an opposite direction. A hulking newsboy had watched Rube and Jennie and noted the transfer of money from the girl to the country lad. He began to shadow Rube, edging up closer gradually.

"D'at kid ought ter be a good graft," he muttered. "Wonder how much he got outer d'e gal?"

Rube wandered aimlessly along toward the upper Bowery, looking for lodging-house signs. He had already learned enough of city ways to be aware that he must find a very cheap place, and perhaps go supperless if he avoided spending the night on the streets or at the police station.

At a crowded corner he stopped and again looked at the money, holding it in his open palm. Then he was suddenly jostled from behind. At the same instant a dirty, dexterous hand snatched the change from him, as he pitched forward into the gutter.

But Rube Rawlins was game, despite his city greenness. Recovering, he saw the back of a lad about his own age disappearing amid the hurrying throngs of workers now hastening to their homes.

"By mighty!" he cried. "I'll ketch that feller or bust a trace a trying. Hey, there! Stop him! He's got my money!"

The people, however, only looked or laughed as Rube plowed his way through them with eyes eagerly fixed on the fleeing thief. Around another corner, up a side street, into an alley, through a court, and finally out into another large thoroughfare did the boy from Pike County follow the possessor of his coin. He was not to be shaken off. Double and twist as he would, the street gamin found that he had met his match in speed.

Rube did not know enough to cry "Stop thief." Therefore those who happened to notice the running boys gave little heed. And now Rube was gaining. He did not know where he was. All he at present wanted was to lay his hands on the rogue who had served him such a mean trick.

"Now—durn—ye!" panted the pursuer, thrusting a large, bony hand that had been hardened and strengthened at the plow-handle, inside the collar of the thief. "Gi' me back my money, or I'll mash your mouth!"

"Pow—wow!" The newsboy had turned like a flash and planted two stinging blows in Rube's face. But the effect was only to anger the country lad yet more. He gripped the other in a relentless embrace, tripped and flung him heavily in genuine Pike County style, then sat on him and began a choking process that speedily aided the fall in bringing the foe to terms.

"Gim' me my money! Drat ye! Shell it out, I say!"

"Oh, Lord!" gasped the newsboy. "I only wanted it to buy papes. I'ze broke, I is. Dad'll do me up, he will, if I don't sell no papes."

"You oughtn't to steal my money," said Rube, half-relenting. "It is all I had, too. I hain't got nowhere to go, either."

"Yer' is ye'r scads." The newsboy handed over the dime and nickel. "Now lem me up. Got no place to go, eh? I seen yer was a country bloke. Well, d'en, why don't yer come along wi'd me? I'll show yer where to sleep, and ye'r mun' will do to buy grub wi'd. See?"

"I don't think I ought to trust you—yet—" Rube gave way under a feeling that he was hungry, and if a lodging could be procured for nothing, he felt that some supper would be in sight. "Well—go on. I'm bound to make this fifteen cents go as far as I can."

The newsboy linked his arm in that of Rube and led the way into a slummy region that grew dirtier and more suspicious-looking as they advanced. Rube at last refused to go further.

"I don't like the looks of this," he remonstrated.

"Come on! Don't be such a mug!" exclaimed his conductor. "We'ze 'most to d'e place."

"What place?" began Rube. Then some one or something sprang on the country boy from behind, while his conductor tackled the victim from the front.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIGURE IN THE CHAIR.

Rube Rawlins fought like a tiger, but even tigers succumb to great odds. Instead of one adversary, he now had three.

The thief had artfully drawn the country boy on until he had a chance to signal some of his own gang. The assault was made at a dark, deserted spot, and Rube's chances of preserving his money were very slim. One lad held him around the neck, another grasped his legs, while the third forced his hand open and again extracted the coin.

Then Rube was flung into the gutter with great force, while his foes fled. By the time he had picked himself up he realized that they were beyond reach.

"Durn it all!" he ejaculated, as he made his way to the nearest street. "I wish I was back in Mizzoury. Times might 'a' been hard there, but I never was robbed, nor wanted for a place to eat and sleep!"

He wandered about in an aimless way for, perhaps, half an hour. His limbs ached, and he was bruised in more than one place.

At a certain street corner he looked about in some astonishment, for he saw that he was at the mouth of the alley leading to the rear of his uncle's house. A sudden resolve made him swallow what little pride he might have retained.

"I'll just go back and beg Jennie for a bite to eat," he decided. "She can't do more than say no."

So he made his way up the alley, that

was now quite dark in places. A gate opened, and Rube dodged behind a garbage box without thinking much about the matter. A gleam from the street lamp at the corner shot a narrow ray of light, across which Rube saw clearly a heavily built, shabby man pass. The gate out of which he had come was that leading into Mr. Rawlins's back yard.

"Wonder what he wanted in there?" thought Rube, entering the gate and stealthily creeping toward the basement door.

"That was a tough-looking feller," he thought. "If he was up to any mischief I would know him if I ever seen him again. Gee—mineddy! I wish I was sitting down to hot biscuits, bacon and coffee."

All the windows of the house were still dark except the upper one, where he had seen Jennie before she came down.

"Reckon she must have got back and cleared up the supper things. I swanny! I'm so hungry I just can't stand it. Wonder if I couldn't slip in and sneak a bite? Uncle Eben would never miss it, and he owes me that much for coming so far to see him, anyhow."

He tiptoed his way to a door that proved to be unlocked. He thrust his head inside, where a half gloom reigned in the corridor, that enabled him to see a stairway, down which came the rays of a light from the hall overhead.

Rube felt for the kitchen door, entered and filled his pockets with eatables from a cupboard there, but instead of going out when he returned to the corridor, he thought he would creep up the stairs and see if he could detect any sign of life there, for the utter stillness of the house made him vaguely uneasy. If anything had happened, perhaps Uncle Eben would be glad if Rube found it out, and be then disposed to give his nephew a warmer welcome. A thought of the shabby man's brutal face strengthened this idea.

"That feller just came out of here," Rube reasoned. "He might have been up to mischief—my goodness! What is that?"

He climbed the basement stairs, until he could look down the broad hall leading to the front street door. His eye had fallen on an object that looked like a human form, seated in a chair beside the hat-rack and near the foot of the stairs that led to the floor above. The object was motionless, and the gaslight further forward was turned down so low as to render the view rather indistinct.

As Rube gazed, something about the attitude of the figure alarmed the boy; but Rube was no coward, and determined to investigate further. Step by step he noiselessly advanced, scanning the shape that moved not at all.

"Great God-a-mighty!" he gasped, suddenly drawing back. "Is that you—is that—a—knife!"

He broke off suddenly, searched his pockets for a match, struck it and held it up above the form in the chair. Then he staggered back against the wall and burst into tears.

The form in the chair was that of an elderly man, well, though not fashionably dressed. Protruding from the neck was the handle of a dagger, the whole blade of which was buried in such a way that the jugular vein must have been pierced.

"This—beats—my—time!" faltered Rube. "Oh, Lord! I wish I had stayed in old Pike, I do!"

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERIOUS PACKAGE.

He shook with such a rigor of terror he could hardly stand. Noticing a small package on the floor, he mechanically picked it up. As he did so a light step sounded on the stairs behind him and a slight scream gave him another sickening thrill.

He whirled, and beheld a figure in white descending from the landing above. It was Jennie, though she looked almost unearthly in the half light, clad as she was in her night clothing. She was looking at the dead man, and with horror depicted in every feature.

"Who is that in the chair?" she demanded, without appearing to notice Rube other than by this query.

"It is Uncle Eben. Gracious me, Jennie! Who has done this?"

Jennie turned her gaze on the boy as if beholding him for the first time. Then she came down slowly, holding a candle over her head, and peering forward nervously. Suddenly she screamed again.

"You have done this!" she cried. "You are no nephew. Mr. Rawlins knew what he was about when he turned you out. You—you—have killed the—poor—man—"

Her words ran into unintelligible gasps and she fell at Rube's feet, dashing out her light, while at the same moment the front door rattled sharply, as if about to be opened from without.

"Blame it all!" exclaimed Rube, nearly frightened to death. "This ain't no stamping ground for me. I ain't killed nobody."

With the instinct of self-preservation strong within him, he ran down the back stairs, out through the yard into the alley, and thence to the street. Along the pavements he hurried for many blocks, until he was out of breath. Then he found that he had retained possession of the package he had mechanically picked up from the feet of the dead man.

"I wish I hadn't touched it!" he reflected. "Don't look like it amounts to much, but I was that bad skeered I didn't know what I was doing. Blamed if I take it back, though. Ugh! I wouldn't go back there for all of poor Uncle's money, and father said he had a heap. Hello! 'Scuse me stranger, I—What—that you again?"

Some one had bumped into Rube as the two met at a corner. A second look and the two knew each other.

"Hi, country! Haven't you found the police station yet?"

It was the sharp-looking lad in blue he had met somewhat similarly scarce two hours ago, who now inspected Rube in a cool, good-humored way.

"No, I haven't. This is a pesky big town, ain't it?"

"Too big for you and me to be meeting up so often. I say; you don't travel with much baggage."

The messenger boy tapped the package under Rube's arm, whereat the latter grew more nervous than ever.

"See here," said young Rawlins, "I'm lost, busted, and a stranger. But I'm square, indeed I am. Can't you put me on to some place where I can stay without going to the perlice?"

"Why didn't you try Uncle Eben again?" laughed the other. "Wouldn't he let up and give you a bunk and a meal?"

"No. He—" Then Rube stopped awkwardly, as if he was about to say too much. "I can't go to his house any more. Rube Rawlins is my name. What is yours?"

"Never mind mine, country. I'm in a hurry, now. Got another message to go on time. Meet me in half an hour, first block east of the Grand Central Depot, and I will take you to a Home. Clean beds, bang-up feed, and if you're broke you can work out the pay next morning. Look sharp, now. Such chaps as you are about as safe in New York as a pig in a slaughter house."

The youth in blue vanished, and Rube wandered on, holding tight to the package in a mechanical way. He inquired for the depot, and finally passed it half a block

away, then straggled into a region where the houses were shabby and the saloons numerous. The further east he went the more forbidding did the neighborhood appear.

"Hello, cully! Which way so fast, me ox-eyed daisy?"

A hard-featured, middle-aged woman, whose breath was rank with rum, suddenly appeared on one side of him, while another somewhat younger, yet fully as brazen, linked her arm within his on the other.

"Who be you two?" demanded Rube, striving to release himself. "Let go of me. Where is the Grand Central Deepot?"

"It's all right. We'll show ye the way prisintly, my kid. But first, we'll thry a glass av mixed ale at the Howl in the Wall, here. Come in, me dear. Don't be so moighty backward, now—there's a darlin'!"

While speaking, the two had hustled Rube into a low groggery, despite his struggles. He aimed a blow with the package at one of the women, but a huge, hairy hand interposed from behind and jerked the parcel from the boy's fingers. Then the same force shoved him through an inner door, where he fell on a floor sprinkled with sawdust. Rube sprang up, but before he could run off a man thrust himself between the women and the boy and held out the package.

"Here you are," said the fellow. "Take ye'r bundle and set 'em up for the ladies afore I wipes the flure wi'd ye. D'ye hear?"

But as Rube looked at the man his own face grew pale, and he shrank into a corner, for before him was the face of the stout, shabby man, whom he had seen leaving the yard of his uncle's house just previous to Rube's discovery of the corpse.

"I want to get out!" shouted Rube, in a voice that brought the barkeeper out from behind the bar, while a third man sauntered forward from the rear of the saloon.

This last comer was about sixty, with bull-like shoulders and a great mop of matted hair that straggled through sundry rents in his hat. His big, purplish face was smirched with dirt and his eyes were bloodshot and watery. His jaw was as heavy as that of a bulldog.

"What's d'e matter now?" he demanded in a husky tone. "Let d'e kid alone, Steve. If he's goin' to act d'e gentleman, what's d'e use er all d'at bluff. D'e kid'll treat. 'Course he will. I sees it in his eyes."

This adroit confirmation of the idea that he was expected to pay for the drinks all around was not lost on Rube. Steve blocked up the doorway leading to the street. The boy felt nervously in his pockets.

"I can't treat, 'cause I ain't got any money!" he faltered. "A feller with two pals robbed me—"

"Rats!" hissed Steve, ironically. "Look a-here, kid. What you got in d'is bundle?"

He again had hold of the package and was scrutinizing it closely. Rube trembled as he watched him, but it was evident that Steve did not seem to recognize the parcel.

"What's d'is" he reiterated, in a more peremptory tone.

"I—I—ain't just able to tell," stammered Rube. "In fact, I don't know. Indeed I don't, sure as preaching."

"A—a—h! Don't be too fresh, young feller!" Steve, as he spoke, took out his knife. "I'm goin' ter see what you're kerryin' around, just for givin' me d'at stiff."

Steve cut the cord and opened the wrapper, while the others crowded about curiously. Then he started and his jaw fell in undisguised amazement, while sundry

exclamations from the women and the bartender testified to their surprise. The elderly man said nothing, but in his eyes came a deadly, avaricious look.

"Here is a go!" exclaimed Steve. "I guess we've caged a fine-feathered bird, after all he sings so poor."

The package was crammed with bank bills of large denominations.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE HOLE IN THE WALL.

Great rolls of green notes were carelessly wadded together, like rags in a bag. The total amount of the money thus exposed undoubtedly ran well up into the thousands.

"Come, now, young feller," said the elderly man, "I'm the boss here, and I say as you've got to square yourself afore I hands you over to the police. Where did you lag this swag? Come, now! None of ye'r shenanigan."

"Well, sir," began Rube, greatly dismayed, "I—picked—it up. I did, sir, and that is a fact, sure as I'm an onfortunate boy."

The ruffians gathered more closely around the boy, with a cruel covetousness in their eyes. Rube felt that they were equal to murdering him for the money should the occasion arise. Oh, how he wished himself back in old Missouri.

"Look here, kid!" said Steve, the stout man, whom Rube had encountered in the alley. "Who d'ye think is going to swaller such stuffin' as d'at?"

"Dry up, Steve," interposed the old man. "Let d'e kid alone. He knows how he come by d'e cash and he knows that I can take keer of it for him better than he can himself. Ain't d'at d'e case, kid?"

"I don't know. I suppose so, only I don't know but that I ought to take this money back. I had no idea it was money, you know."

"Of course. We knows all d'at, and more, too." The elderly man winked again and carefully assumed the custody of the package. "You don't want fer take it back; you want ter send it. See? You want ter send it by me. I'll explain everything so as you won't have no trouble. Slooger is my name—Dan Slooger, of the Hole in the Wall. Here, barkeep! Set 'em up all around. We'll drink to the hilt of our young friend, here. Sharp kid he is an' no mistake."

While the drinks were being prepared, the two women could hardly refrain from snatching at the protruding wads of bills, as old Slooger tied up the bundle for safer keeping. Rube was again quizzed as to where he had found the package.

"Found it!" sneered Steve. "Better ask the kid where he stole it. What the blamed mischief should the likes of him be doin' with d'at wad of stuff unless he cribbed the same?"

"I didn't steal nothing!" Rube was angered by this accusation out of his precautionary reticence. "I found it. Want to know where?"

"Am I askin' for fun, d'yer reckon?"

"Well, then, I found it in the house where I saw you coming out of the back gate not more than an hour or two ago—"

"Ye'r a liar!" Steve seized Rube by the throat and shook the boy until the boss interfered.

"Let the kid alone!" roared Slooger to Steve, who was Slooger's son.

"D'e bloke's givin' us a stiff!" insisted Steve, angrily. "I'll do him yet for jollyin' like d'at."

"I say I am not lying," cried Rube, feeling now that, perhaps, he had better speak plainly, seeing that he had gone thus far in an accusation. "What is more, he knows I am telling the truth. I saw him

in the alley. Then I went in. Never mind why. I went inside the house."

"And there you lagged the dope." It was Slooger who spoke, while Steve was looking uneasy in his wrath. "You might get five years at Elmiry for d'is job, boy!"

"I found the package there—found it on the floor in the house where I was; and, what is more, I saw there something else. There was a dead man—in a chair. He had a knife in his neck. Oh, he looked awful. That was just after I seen him"—pointing at Steve—"leave the back yard of that very house."

Dan Slooger fixed a lowering eye upon his brutal-looking son, for such Steve was.

"The kid is a blamed liar, I say!" shouted Steve, with rather unnecessary vehemence. "Don't I know his game?"

"You've been tryin' to bleed d'e old man again," said the father, angrily, as he brought his great fist down on the bar heavily. "I believe the kid is tellin' d'e troot—d'at I does— See? You've done d'e old man up at last and you've ruined us all."

"I ain't done nothin' of the kind," returned Steve. "I does own up to goin' to that there house—the house of old Eben Rawlins, there, but—but when I left the house d'e old man was cussin' me blue—he was, for a fact. Nary a dollar would he give me—"

"You are lyin', Steve!" interrupted Slooger, Senior, tucking the package under his arm. "But, whatever you done, this kid, here, knows too much. Here—you!" to his bartender. "Take the bloke down cellar and lock him up in the coal hole till we gets at d'e straight of d'is thing. Mind you, don't let him get away, Jake."

"Lemme go!" shouted Rube, as Jake Slosson seized him. "I won't be locked up! H—e—l—p! M—u—r—d—e—r!"

The large hand of Steve Slooger closed over Rube's mouth and his cries subsided into chokes and gurgles as he was dragged back, resisting as best he could. The boss swore lustily, but while his back was turned, the sight of the package under his arm was too much for one of the women, who made a wild lunge.

The parcel, jerked away, disappeared beneath a ragged shawl, and Leary Kate, as she was called, darted toward the front door. A great outcry arose, but at this juncture the door was thrown open and in sprang a youngster in blue, who overturned Kate as if she had been a sack of salt. The package flew from her grasp, but before any one else could reach it, the youthful stranger had picked it up, backed himself against the wall, and drawn a gleaming, blue-barreled revolver.

"Stand back!" he cried, his blue eyes scanning every person in the room, as if to make a study of each one of them.

CHAPTER V.

SEEKING A CLEW.

Let us follow the messenger boy after making the appointment with Rube Rawlins at the Grand Central Depot.

His course was down-town, until, when in the neighborhood of the Rawlins residence, he noticed a crowd gathered about the door of a house. A policeman was at the door.

"What is the racket here?" thought the messenger. "Hello! Blessed if it isn't the very house I am hunting," and he edged his way toward the door.

From the glare from a street lamp opposite into the hall, something in white could be seen on the stairs. A number of men were moving about inside.

"Come, now!" said the officer, to the messenger boy. "You get back," at the same time waving his hand at a patrol wagon, which drew presently up to the curb before the house.

"Have a message for Mr. Eben Rawlins, No. 183 Blank-Street," retorted the lad, boldly. "Don't he live here?"

"This is his house, youngster, but the man is dead."

"Dead? Well, ain't there anybody to receipt for the message?"

"Wait till I call the sergeant, and don't ye stir from the step."

Presently a portly, self-important looking officer in plain clothes appeared at the door. He beckoned the messenger boy to enter. Then he looked at the lad closely.

"Give me the message," he said. "I am Sergeant Sloper, of the Central detective force. You wait here; we may require your services when we see what the message is."

The lad entered with the sergeant, but stopped suddenly as he caught a view of the corpse in the chair.

The ghastly sight gave the nervy boy a shock. He walked quickly backward to the stairway, and began to ascend it. At the first landing sat the girl in white whose figure he had noticed from the street.

"That is a pretty girl," thought the messenger boy—whose name was Adam Hoke—as she raised her tear-moistened eyes to meet his gaze. "What do they let her stay here for?"

"Can you tell me why they will not let me go away?" she asked, in an anxious tone. "I have been kept here ever so long."

"It is a dead shame. But these coppers can be pretty mean when they want to be. I know their ways. Tell me all about your trouble, won't you? I shouldn't wonder if I could help you, so tell me everything."

"I would if—if I thought it would do any good. But you are only a boy, and I don't see how you can help me any."

"True. I'm only a boy, but I am up to snuff. Don't you forget that, sissy!"

"Well, I'll tell all I know, then," remarked Jennie, for it was she. "As far as I know, Mr. Rawlins and I were the only ones in the house. I went out to do some marketing. Then I went to my own room by a back stairway. Then—oh, oh! I hate to talk about it. It frightens me!"

"Better explain all, sissy; that'll show me just what to do to help you. Who are you? Old gentleman's daughter?"

"No, indeed! I am the servant. Mr. Rawlins had lots of money, yet he would not keep any one to do the work but a half-grown girl. Didn't cost so much, you see. He used to quarrel dreadful at times with 'most any one that would come about—me especially. He would do strange things, lived mostly to himself and was very queer, altogether. He wouldn't trust banks. I've heard him say so. I always thought he must keep money in the house."

"Then you saw no one else about at all?" asked Adam.

"Nit. The house has been as quiet as a grave since—since—oh! I forgot! There was a boy came this afternoon."

"Boy, eh? Well, what was this boy like? What did he say or do?"

"He first came an hour or so before night, and Mr. Rawlins let him in, as I was busy below about supper. I heard them having words up-stairs, and finally Mr. Rawlins put him out, I believe. After supper I started out to do the marketing, when who should run up to me but a boy who said he was the fellow whom Mr. Rawlins had fired out of the house. Said he was a nephew of Mr. Rawlins, and talked so pitiful that I gave him fifteen cents of my own money to get him a bed."

"That must be my country Jake," thought the messenger boy.

On returning from her marketing, she further stated, she went to her room by the back stairway, and remained there for some time. Then she became uneasy over

the strange quiet, and wondered why she had not heard Mr. Rawlins moving about below, as was his wont. Then, deciding to go down to see what it all meant, she took her candle and proceeded down-stairs.

"When I reached the second story landing," she continued, "I saw a boy standing near the foot of the stairs. Mr. Rawlins was sitting just as you see him now, only his head was up straighter. The boy had a bundle in his hand, and wore a low cap—"

"Bundle—low cap—fired out," thought Adam, linking these evidences in his own mind with the remembrance of the boy he had twice met on the streets.

"Then, as I kept coming down, I saw the knife in the old man's throat." Jennie here shuddered and averted her eyes. "It flashed over me then that the boy might have done the murder."

"What did you do or say?"

"I hardly remember. It seems as if I called on the boy and took a step or two further. Then I felt horribly weak and sick. After that I don't know what happened. When I came to, there were people in the house and the police were just arrived."

"You don't know what became of the boy, I suppose?"

CHAPTER VI.

IN SEARCH OF RUBE RAWLINS.

The girl shook her head; then she added: "Sometimes I almost wonder if I really saw the boy at all."

"Think you might have dreamed it? Well, hardly." Adam pointed to the corpse in the chair. "At any rate, that thing yonder is no dream."

Jennie shivered as she glanced at the figure in the chair. Young Hoke did not seem satisfied.

"Can you think of anything more?" he asked.

"I think that is all. No—let me think. Oh, there was Mr. Sylvester. I declare! What a state of mind I am in to forget him!"

"Who is Mr. Sylvester? This is very important, miss. I am not asking you questions out of idle curiosity, but for your own good; that is, if you hope to see the mystery of this murder solved."

"Mr. Sylvester was Mr. Rawlins's most intimate friend. He may be a relative; I hardly know. They used to have money dealings together. At times I have heard them quarreling. Mr. Sylvester was here, when I came to my senses, but I think he has gone away."

After a few more questions, Adam, though but an acquaintance of ten minutes' standing, shook Jennie's hand warmly as he arose.

"Keep up your spirits, Miss Jennie—er—a—what is your last name, please?"

"My name is Jennie Dare, and I live with my mother in Jersey City, when I am out of a place. Would you like the address? I suppose I shall have to go back there after this affair is over."

"Thanks, awfully," and the East Side Spotter took down the street and number. "Now, Miss Dare, don't you get blue. Things will turn out better than you think. I am going to try my hand on this case just to tantalize the police. Maybe there will be some money in it, too. I must go, now, but you will hear from me again."

"You seem about the only one here who is friendly. I don't know why they should look at me so suspiciously. I didn't do anything."

"Oh, they're at their wits' end and look cross to hide their lack of clues. I like you, Jennie. You are a clean-cut daisy, and Adam Hoke is your friend. You have given me a clue or two and I must hustle to follow it up. Be careful what you say

to that fat, self-important looking copper in plain clothes. That is old Sloper, of the Central detective force. I have got it in for him, for I know him. He is a sly one. Why, he'd lay traps to catch his own father, if he thought he could get a rise out of the scheme. So you better say as little as you can before him. Now I must vamoose."

"They won't let any one out. I heard the word given some time ago."

The spotter winked one eye shrewdly, as he replied:

"I'm on to them. They're talking through their hats. See? Keep your pretty eyes on me. I'm to meet a chap up-town and I'm a little late as it is. See me throw sand in that copper's eyes at the door."

He glided away. Jennie saw him wind sinuously in and out among the people in the hall and talk to the policeman at the door, using many gestures the while. Finally he pointed backward, apparently at the hat rack. By the time the officer's head was turned, Jennie saw Adam suddenly duck his head, dodge under the man's arm, and dive into the crowd without. Pursuit was out of the question, and probably to avoid a reprimand, the officer assumed an air of dignified unconsciousness. Jennie could not help smiling over the lad's cleverness.

Once clear of the crowd, the messenger boy hurried up-town along the east side to the point indicated by him as a rendezvous to Rube Rawlins. The elevated trains clanged and jarred overhead, and many people were swarming down the iron stairs on their way to the big depot near by.

"I wonder if that kid is really as green as he makes himself out to be?" thought Adam, as he looked about warily. "Can he be putting up a job on some one? He certainly is the chap that girl said she saw. One can't make mistakes in detecting his appearance. Bet your life he won't make a hatful out of yours truly!"

But no low-capped country boy with a bundle could the messenger boy see. He made cautious inquiries of an Italian fruit dealer under the girders of the elevated station, then he looked at his watch.

"I am a little late," he muttered, "but it looks as if the bloke could have waited a bit."

Finally he called up an exceedingly alert bootblack, who was running up Forty-second Street. As soon as the East Side Spotter described Rube's pronounced personal peculiarities, the boy snapped his fingers and chuckled.

"I seen d'at cove!" he exclaimed. "He was huggin' d'at bundle and lookin' about more wi'd his mouth than wi'd his eyes."

"Which way did the mug go?" demanded the East Side Spotter.

"Any'ing in it for me?" and the bootblack cocked his eye.

"Just a dime, if you put me on without any foolishness. Come, I'm on the move, I am!"

"D'at's me, too, cully! D'at mug wi'd d'e cap an' bundle was a sashayin' down d'at a way when I seen him last," and he pocketed the dime.

"Know if he turned off at the next corner?"

"Nit. He didn't look like he had sense to run in outer the rain."

The messenger boy flew along the pavement in the direction indicated, and kept a sharp lookout. By dint of persistent and partially efficacious inquiry he at length arrived in a disreputable locality, pretty well over on the East Side. Then he found himself totally at a loss.

Hardly knowing what to do next, he was startled by a shrill, youthful voice, shrieking for aid. It came from a dingy two-story brick building, with an alleyway cut

through its center. On one side was a saloon, and on the other some kind of a closed place, that looked like a blacksmith's shop. The cry issued from the saloon.

All at once the cries were choked off, and Adam, drawing near, heard a sharp shuffling of feet and a murmur of hoarse voices.

"Blame me if that first call don't sound familiar," said young Hoke to himself. Then he pulled out his pistol and looked at the chamber. "Good thing I happen to have this little barker along. I must see the inspector and get permission to carry it regularly."

The young spotter approached the bar-room door and listened intently. The ground glass cut off a view of the interior. So intent was the boy detective on his task that he failed to notice the figure of a man watching the saloon from the opposite side of the street. The uproar inside suddenly increased, and the lad laid his hand on the knob.

"Here goes!" exclaimed the boy detective. "If country is inside, I guess I will soon find it out."

He pushed the door open and sprang within. Then the watcher over the way crossed the street and stationed himself beneath the roofed alleyway, where he could hear what passed inside the bar-room.

CHAPTER VII.

SKIRMISH AT THE HOLE IN THE WALL.

The East Side Spotter was a nervy lad. When he backed himself against the wall with his leveled pistol in one hand and the package of bills in the other, he was, of course, ignorant as to the contents of the parcel.

He saw at a glance that the struggling boy was the one he was looking for, and resolved to stand by his quondam acquaintance. Very likely the package was the one carried by Rube, and of which these rogues were trying to rob the boy. Besides, Adam wanted Rube very much now as a possible aid in solving the mystery of the Rawlins murder.

"Hello there!" sang out the young detective. "Turn that boy loose! Stand back, old man, unless you want a ball in your ribs."

This last to old Slooger, who was edging up rather too closely, his eyes inflamed with rage.

The bartender was creeping around the bar for a revolver that lay in an open drawer there, in full view. Adam, noting this move, sang out to Rube to rush in and seize the weapon. Young Rawlins, having just freed himself from the grasp of Steve, was at first intent only on flight.

"I say, country!" reiterated the messenger boy, still keeping his own weapon pointed at Steve and his father alternately. "Look sharp, now! Grab that pistol and help me out a little."

As he spoke, Adam gave Leary Kate another push, accompanied by a trip that sent her reeling against the other woman. Both rolled on the floor.

Rube now became animated with a purpose to stand by the brave messenger boy to the last. He realized that he had a friend.

Having the advantage of position, Rube darted around the barkeeper, dashed behind the bar, and, seizing the pistol, presented the weapon. The bartender fell back at first, but seeing that the pistol was not cocked, Slosson was upon the lad in an instant, and Rube went down behind the bar amid a crash of glass, with Slosson uppermost.

Seeing this, the young shadower was quick to act. He darted forward, dodging Steve, and leaping over the bar, he

struck Slosson on the head with his own pistol butt.

The barkeeper sank down beside Rube, who arose, but was dizzy, confused from the choking he had received.

"Here you are, country!" shouted the young detective, as he thrust the other pistol into Rube's hand. "Let us make for that side door."

Adam and Rube emerged from behind the bar, to be confronted by Steve and old Slooger, and as the boys darted out, the old man managed to grasp Rube, who, excited and unfamiliar with the handling of a pistol, had again neglected to cock his weapon. Old Slooger threw Rube down, sat upon his breast, and tried to seize the pistol. Again, then, the New York lad showed his nerve and prowess, for, ducking under Steve's arm, he overturned one of the women, and dealt the old man a terrible blow with the butt of his revolver. Then he dragged Rube to his feet.

"Now for it, country!" he cried, making for the side door with the fateful package under his arm. "Run for your life!"

But as Adam, on the lead, was about to dart out, the door opened from without, and a vigorous-looking young woman came in, crying out:

"What's wrong here? What's the matter, father?"

"Stop that bloke, Meg!" roared old Slooger, who was just recovering from the blow dealt him, pointing at Rube. "Stop the cove, you fool!"

The woman opened wide her arms, and clasping Rube, held him tight. Rube was caught sure enough this time.

"We've got you, anyhow!" said Steve, seizing the lad, as Meg released him. "Look sharp after t'other one!" he shouted.

Meanwhile, the messenger boy had burst through the doorway like a young cyclone, and when Leary Kate and the old man reached the alleyway it was deserted. Even the furtive watcher had made himself scarce. They listened and looked, but Adam was not to be seen.

"Where is that there bundle of notes?" demanded old Slooger, when he returned.

"I don't know," replied Rube, much dejected at this new turn of affairs. "I wish I had never laid eyes on it. I wish I was back in Mizzoury!"

"Missouri!" exclaimed the old man, winking at the others. "What part of that wilderness did you come from?"

"Pike County, not far from Hannibal. If you'll only let me get out of this town I'll go back there, soon as ever I can."

"What you doin' in New York? No lies, now, or you'll wish you was somebody else pretty quick."

"I ain't in the habit of lying, mister. I come here to look up an uncle of mine. Father told me to. Father is dead. He said Uncle Eben Rawlins had lots of money, and he would help me out. But—"

"Rawlins, eh?" and Slooger glanced meaningly at his son. "And your uncle give you that nice wad of bills, I guess. But now you've gone and lost it all. I was going to take care of it for you. That's what I often does for foolish kids like you."

"Uncle didn't give me the money." Then Rube stopped, remembering the possible danger of again explaining how he came by the package.

"I des'say you stole the swag," averred Slooger, fiercely. "But never mind; I'll be an uncle to you, boy. Where did you say you got the mun'?"

"I—I found it—in a house. I hardly know where," Rube responded. "I am a stranger in this town. He knows where the house is," pointing at Steve. "I told you all that before, and what I said is the truth."

"Rats! You talk with your mouth too much. Steve ain't been nowhere. But I'll

see to you. I'll be an uncle to you. And I will take care of you till that same package of money comes back. See?"

The gang were evidently alarmed at Rube's knowledge of certain things, imperfect as it was. The boy tremulously protested at being further detained, but was hustled off to the rear in the custody of Steve and the woman called Meg.

They passed through a dirty court at the rear and ascended some steps to a shanty perched on somewhat higher ground. Rube was taken into a squalid-looking room, with but one entrance and a high, narrow window. Escape therefrom would be difficult, if not impossible.

"Now, youngster," said Steve, "here you stays until we says go. Meg will look after you, and Meg is a dandy on the shoot herself when she gets excited. Quiet is the word for you, my Jew lark."

Rube sat down listlessly on the single bed the room contained, quite disheartened.

An hour or two passed, and the night grew very quiet. Rube soon feigned sleep, when Meg slipped out and locked the door.

Rube was up in a moment, and, lighting a taper, found the door, which he succeeded in opening.

Closing the door softly, he crept down the narrow staircase, opened the hall door cautiously, and once again was free.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS PACKAGE.

When the East Side Spotter shot through the side door of the saloon and found himself in the street, he ran so fast that he did not notice any one else lurking about the alleyway. Darting down another court, he made his way to a thoroughfare, and then hurried deviously here and there for several blocks before he felt that he had dodged pursuit, should any be undertaken. Finally, he drew up under a street lamp and opened one end of the package he had so strangely seized.

"Great Scott!" he exclaimed. "No wonder they all want to swing to this. This case grows deeper and deeper!"

Then he walked on, until he drew near some coal yards. The locality was dark and deserted at that hour. Hearing a somewhat distant footfall, he listened to the stealthy tread, that once more ceased. The street lamps were widely separated, and he could not see far. A large lumber yard also stretched along one side of the street. On the other were warehouses besides the coal yards.

"Believe I will turn down the next street," determined Adam, uneasily. "There is enough money here, I should judge, to cause half a dozen murders. Everything seems to point suspicion at that boy. But if he is into it, I'll bet the is used more as a blind or stool pigeon than anything else. The man who did that job evidently understood his work."

The sound of the footsteps now rapidly approached, so the suspicious Adam dodged in at an open gateway and glided behind a huge pile of lumber. He picked up a stick about as long as a walking-stick. It was a handy cudgel. Nearer came the footsteps.

Suddenly the sound of them again ceased, as if the party had halted. Was he pursued, and had his pursuer gone noiselessly away? Hardly; yet—

"Well, young fellow," said a strident voice in the lad's ear, causing him to almost jump in his tracks, "you were looking the wrong way, this time, I guess."

The speaker, who had noiselessly approached Adam from behind, as he spoke grasped Adam's wrist so suddenly that the package of money fell to the ground, and before the boy had turned he received a blow from some blunt instrument that would have knocked him senseless had he

received the full force squarely on the head.

As it was, the blow glanced, when Adam dodged, raking the back of his skull with a power sufficient to draw blood and at the same time send him staggering forward to his knees.

He sprang up at once, but his mysterious pursuer and the package had already disappeared around the corner of the big lumber pile.

"I will kill that chap, whoever he is," and whipping out his pistol, around and around among the lumber piles he made his way, and at length found himself, dejected and weary, at the very spot where the encounter had occurred. His foot struck something in the dirt. He picked it up.

It was a cigar case, dropped undoubtedly by the man who had committed the assault and made off with the package of money. Adam hurried to the nearest street light and examined his find.

Upon one side of the morocco case, in letters of silver, was the name "John H. Sylvester."

The messenger boy emitted a low whistle of surprise.

"Great Caesar!" he ejaculated. "That must be the Sylvester spoken of by Jennie! The particular friend of old Rawlins, who had money dealings and quarrels with the old man! Well, well! Things are, indeed, getting complicated. I'll just skip back to the office and tell our night boss that I am ailing with my head—had a fall or something—and then take a wash. After that I will think things over and lay off for a day or two."

He started briskly onward and felt his courage already rising again.

When morning came the East Side Spotter felt still better. His head promised to trouble him but little, and the wound was hardly noticeable.

First he concluded he would call on Jennie, and see what further she might have to say. Leave of absence had been obtained from the office of the company by which he was employed. Arriving at the house of the late Mr. Rawlins, he found the shutters closed, the door locked, and, apparently, no one at home.

"What's the use of trying to get into an empty house?" said a man with a note book and pencil, who seemed to be a sort of rent or rate collector.

"Where have they gone?" asked Adam, his spirits lowering, somewhat.

"Well, the dead man is at the undertaker's. I guess you don't want to see him. The girl—hired girl, I believe—she is out on bail."

"Out on bail! Well, all I have to say is that the arrest of this poor girl and forcing her to give bail is a breezy shame. That little kid is as innocent of the Rawlins murder as I am. Sloper is getting soft in the head. Foosh! Don't I know him?"

The boy detective paused, feeling that he was in danger of expressing himself too vigorously. The man appeared to be reminded of something, and referred to his note-book.

"I want to ask you a few questions," he said.

CHAPTER IX.

CLEW OF THE CIGAR CASE.

The East Side Spotter laughed sardonically.

"Sail in, old man! Is it about rents or water rates?"

"No chinning, now. You are a city delivery messenger. Where did you go last night after you gave us the slip at this house?"

"Where did I go? I suppose I might have gone to bed. Rustling hot telegrams

makes me tired. But what business of yours is it where I went?"

"It is a good deal of my business, as you will soon find out. Now, answer my question, young fellow."

"Of course I won't answer. Think you've got me in your headquarters' sweat-box? Go talk to the marines. What kind of bluff are you putting up, Phil McGraw?"

The man stepped back, somewhat disconcerted. Then he laughed, in a sort of mirthless way, as he retorted.

"You are a bit too fresh, my lad. That is not my name—"

"Rats! Go twist your whiskers. I'll swear you haven't had them on over two hours. Don't I know you? Ain't you old Sloper's waiting boy? Can't I remember how you used to clean out spittoons in the inspector's room, when there was no errands to run or newsboys to bully? There isn't a lad in our down-town office who wouldn't know you, any time, even if you buried yourself in whiskers."

"I have a good mind to smash you," growled the irate headquarters man, for such he was.

"Well, all I have to say is that Sloper must be hard run for talent when he falls back on the likes of you, Phil McGraw. Sloper ain't very much himself, when it comes to real fine work. But all the disguising in town won't make even a Sloper out of you."

"See here!" The would-be detective seized Adam by the collar and dragged him into the doorway. "I'll give you one more chance. Will you tell me where you went last night?"

"Not by a long sight. D'ye spiel? You can tell your fat boss, though, that he is putting his dull nose on a dead cold trail."

Then the boy detective jerked himself loose from McGraw's grasp, butted the man lightly in the stomach, and dodged into the street again. He ran off laughing, and for half an hour kept out of sight. Then he cautiously made his way through the alley to the back yard gate of the Rawlins residence and reconnoitered the surroundings carefully.

Taking out a bunch of skeleton keys with which he had provided himself, the boy soon gained an entrance into the yard. Thence, after a cautious look around, he forced his way through a basement window into the house.

Inside all was dark and deserted. Hollow echoes resounded through the rooms at every movement of the boy investigator.

He struck a match, pulled down the hall burner, and lighted the same. A sort of crawling thrill tingled through his veins as he looked around and noted the very chair in which the dead man had been seated, still in its place by the hat-rack.

Adam examined the spot closely. Then he went down on his knees and began searching the floor.

"I have learned one thing about circumstantial evidence," he said, to himself. "Every little may help out a case. No matter how trifling a thing appears to be—Hello!"

He picked up a much-trampled fragment. Smoothing it out and wiping off the dirt, he found it to be a piece of thin morocco leather. Then the lad grew excited.

Taking the cigar case from his pocket he placed the crumpled fragment upon the same, fitting to a corner of the flap from which a piece had been torn. The two edges fitted exactly.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "This is indeed better than I could have hoped for. I wonder, now, what Mr. John H. Sylvester could have been doing here with his cigar case!"

A very slight noise at his rear caused the lad to look around, when a harsh voice ordered:

"Give that cigar case to me. D'ye hear?"

A hand from behind grasped at the cigar case, but plucky Adam held to it, together with the precious fragment; and, suddenly lowering his head, the man behind slid downward over Adam's neck and head, and fell full length on the floor.

When the fellow arose, cursing furiously, he found himself looking into the boy spotter's dancing eyes over the barrel of a leveled revolver.

"Why, Phil, old boy," exclaimed the young detective, "haven't you had enough of this case yet? Go back, sonny, before your mother finds you are out. She might worry, you know."

"Hang it all!" growled the disgusted McGraw. "How did you get in here? I had an idea you would be back, so I lay for you."

"Much good it did you, eh, Phil? Want to know how I got in? Well, follow me and see."

Adam was warily backing toward the basement stairs, still keeping McGraw covered.

"Look here!" cried the baffled officer. "You had better let me know your business here. I tell you Sergeant Sloper will find a way to make you speak. I give you this as a fair warning."

"Well, Phil, old Sloper might induce me to split and give myself away, but not you, Phil. You had better go back to the spittoons. Ta-ta, old boy!"

The young detective hastened down the stairs, leaped through the open window, and bolted out at the gate, and then glancing back, he saw McGraw at the window, impotently shaking his fist.

"Now rack your shallow pate," thought the lad, as he rapidly left the neighborhood. "It takes a better man than you to walk in ahead of yours truly! Hang his impudence! Why don't he work up his own case?"

From one street to another he dodged, making quick turns through several courts and alleys, and finally remained in a cheap eating house near the Hudson River until he felt confident that McGraw, if he had attempted to follow, had been thrown from the trail. After that the young special took the ferry and crossed to Jersey City.

Ten minutes later found him in the neighborhood of the address given him by Jennie as the residence of her mother. He knocked, and was admitted by a plump, well-favored woman of middle age, who, in reply to his queries concerning Jennie, grew angry at once and attempted to close the door. But the boy inserted one leg, though his manner was extremely propitiatory as he said:

"I'm not from the police, ma'am. I dare say they have been troubling you, but I have nothing to do with them. Indeed, I haven't. I am a friend of Jennie. She would tell you so in a minute."

"I wish I knew whether to believe you," returned the woman, dubiously. "They have worried the life out of us, them coppers have. They made my gell give bond, though she knows nothing, and since then there is always some fellow from headquarters prowling about. They knock at all hours and ask the most imperdent questions. Well, they pestered the girl so, that this morning she left early."

"It's a cruel shame the way those blokes do. It is, indeed. But as I said before, I'm not one of them. I am looking into this case on my own hook, and had a talk with your girl the night of the inquest."

The woman regarded Adam curiously; then she opened the door a little wider as she spoke:

"Are you that messenger boy as talked to my gell on the stairs?"

"The identical chicken. And I tell you, ma'am, your daughter is a corker, she is. Where can I find her?"

"Indeed, I don't know. Said she to me, 'If I don't tell you where I am going, mother, you won't be lying when you say you don't know.' She's cute, that gell is. She looked for you before she left, I think, and was disappointed you didn't call early this morning."

"Been too busy to get here before. Well, can't you give me an idea as to where she is? I want to—"

Adam stopped as the postman ran up the steps with a letter for the woman, saying, as he did so:

"For Mrs. Julia Coburn. That you?"

"Me it is." Then to Adam: "It is Jennie's hand write. Perhaps she will let us know where she has got to, at last."

The woman read the letter, then looked at the boy detective.

"She has gone to a sister of hers over in Brooklyn," said Mrs. Coburn. "Jennie is a sharp girl, and she writes for me to tell no one her address but you, if you happened to call. You see, she don't want to be bothered so much. She will have to go to court when the time comes, and she thinks that is all the police ought to want."

"Right she is, ma'am. But she knows I am her friend. Now for her address."

Mrs. Coburn gave it, and, bidding her a cheery good-day, the boy spotter-special was off. Not long thereafter he entered a small green square in one of the neat, though not aristocratic, suburbs of Brooklyn, and, crossing it, approached a quiet-looking dwelling where a small boy was playing on the steps. Adam accosted the child, and was about to ascend the steps, when some one rapped on the window of the basement. He looked, and there was Jennie, smiling and beckoning.

Adam entered the small area, as a door opened, and the girl appeared. She held out her hand.

CHAPTER X.

SHADOWING SYLVESTER.

The boy detective was ushered into a cozy dining room. The door closed, and he was alone with the bright little maid.

"I was looking out for you," she explained. "Somehow I felt that you would want to see me, so I hurried off a note to mother early this morning. I hope everything is going on as well as you can expect."

"Oh, yes. It was a shame for old Sloper to have you put under bond for your appearance. I just know it was his work."

"I feel sure that Mr. Sylvester was the cause. He has been acting so strangely, I hear."

"I have met that party," explained the young spotter, dryly. "He did me rather a dirty trick last night."

Then he told Jennie of his adventures at the Hole in the Wall, and of his own subsequent encounter at the lumber yard, which resulted in the loss of the package of money.

"How very strange," commented Jennie. "Did the package contain much money?"

"There must have been a good deal. I saw the edges of great rolls of notes. This Sylvester must have known of its value, or he would not have ventured on so desperate course to obtain it from me."

"But how do you know that the man who did you up was Mr. Sylvester?"

The young detective drew forth the cigar case and showed the girl the name engraved thereon. Then he pointed to the torn corner of the flap and produced the soiled patch and fitted the parts together.

"I found this case on the spot where we had our struggle," explained the boy. "To me it seems almost conclusive evi-

dence that the fellow who assaulted me was Sylvester. Afterward I picked up this piece, which you see fits and matches the torn flap."

"I don't see what the piece proves? Was the case torn in the scuffle between you two?"

"It was torn before that. I found this piece under the chair in the hall where the body of Mr. Rawlins was found seated."

"Isn't it awful!" Jennie shivered and clasped her little hands. "Why, that looks as if Mr. Sylvester and Mr. Rawlins might have had a fight or something—does it not?"

"Well, it looks pretty bad for Sylvester. I suppose he might say that the piece got there in some other way. A man would naturally say anything to clear himself of a crime like that. The cigar case shows that Sylvester must have been about the old man when he was murdered. The torn piece indicates a struggle. The case also is good presumptive proof that Sylvester got that package away from me. The assault shows that he must have known its value or he wouldn't have risked highway robbery to possess himself of it. Also, this same package is the one carried by the boy who claims to be Mr. Rawlins's nephew, and I fully believe that it belonged to the old gentleman. How the boy came by it, or how John Sylvester came to know where and what it was, or how that torn piece of morocco was placed under that hall chair, we hardly know now, but I venture to say we will know, before long."

As Jennie thought over the curdling nature of the drama in which she was so innocently concerned, she again shuddered. Then she felt grateful to the messenger boy for what he had already done in ferreting out the crime. He seemed to be quite a hero in her eyes already.

"Your mother said that the police troubled you," remarked Adam.

"There is one detective. His name is McGraw. He followed me everywhere, I think, from the time I first left the house of Mr. Rawlins. I hope he did not get on my track when I first left Jersey City for Brooklyn."

"I know the chap. He is a fraud of the first water. Should he trouble you much more, let me know. When and where can I see you again?"

"I shall stay on here, as far as I know. My sister has gone out, or you would see her. I brought you in here so we might not be interrupted by the children. If I happen to go off you can see my sister. She will be posted. When she learns how much you have found out she will be glad that you have taken such an interest in the case. At first she thought it strange that I should have confided in a stranger."

"All right. She shall judge me by what I do rather than what I say. You can always count on me, Jennie."

The two had risen from their chairs, as the boy detective indicated a purpose of going. Adam, standing with his back to a window, was surprised to see Jennie make a startled movement, while her eyes suddenly dilated with alarm. She pointed toward the street.

"Look!" she cried. "Look quick! There they are again!"

The East Side Spotter turned in time to see a couple of men disappear behind some shrubbery in the square. It was but a glimpse, yet he recognized one of the pair.

"Phil McGraw!" he ejaculated, as he turned to Jennie again. "I did not quite catch who the other was."

"I know. It was John Sylvester. I would recognize those mutton-chop whiskers anywhere." Jennie made a grimace. "How I hate that man, though I hardly know why."

"I'm not stuck on the mug. See what

he give me." The lad showed her the bruise on the back of his head. "I'll even him up for that lick yet."

"I know now what I feared before," remarked Jennie, thoughtfully.

"What is that? Nothing alarming, I hope?"

"Mr. Sylvester, for reasons of his own, is having me shadowed. That other man, McGraw, was always hanging about our Jersey City house. He, no doubt, followed me when I came here. Seeing Sylvester with him makes me feel sure that Sylvester is at the bottom of it. Is it not terrible?"

"I think I understand his motives. He has a reason for wanting to implicate some one else. Remember this cigar case. But you must trust me to expose these villainies and bring the murderers and robbers to justice. I'll do it or my name is not Artful Adam."

"I trust you implicitly. Don't run into danger, though, on my account. I should be unhappy."

"Well, I am glad you feel an interest in me. But a detective who won't rush into danger when the case and the occasion require it, is hardly worth his salt. I will be careful—that is, as careful as I dare to be. Don't you worry. It will be a chilly day when they catch me nodding. Now I must shadow those blokes. They are up to no good. Keep mum and don't get the blues. Remember—I am on to their little game every time."

Adam shook hands, then slipped across the street into the square. Jennie watching him until he disappeared among the shrubbery in the wake of the two men, sighed and turned away.

CHAPTER XI.

BURPEE AT THE HOLE IN THE WALL.

At the Hole in the Wall the gas had just been lighted when a rustic-looking individual, wearing steel-bowed spectacles, dropped in and ordered a glass of beer. This was several days later than the time of the occurrences already narrated.

"I am lookin' for a boy of mine," he informed Slosson, the bartender. "Ran away. Bound out to me, you know, by his father. Father died. The boy skipped to New York, where he said he had an uncle."

"New York is a big place," returned Slosson, carelessly. "'Bout as soon look for a needle in a haystack as for a lost kid in New York. Been to the police?"

The man indicated by a nod that he had. Then he buried his nose in his schooner, and sighed deeply.

"Where does that boy's uncle live?" asked Slosson.

"Further down-town. Blessed if I can seem to find the house. That boy's name was Rawlins—"

"Say that again!" spoke up old Slooger, coming forward from the rear of the saloon, where he had been listening.

The stranger recapitulated his statement, and pushed his empty glass across the bar to be refilled.

"That is pretty fair beer," he remarked, "but it ain't ek'al to our St. Louis brew, back home. I s'pose ye hain't seen no such boy around here?" he added, looking vaguely around.

"Why, no," replied the old man. "We ain't a 'sylum for stray kids. What might be your name?"

"Burpee. That boy was such a lazy cuss! Wouldn't hardly do nothing."

"Should hardly think you'd be so anxious to get him back, then," sneered Slooger, incredulously. "Nine hundred mile is a good way to come for a no count kid. Railroad fares come high. Rats! Tell us something else that ain't rotten."

"Bet you a fifty that what I say is so,"

bantered the stranger, flourishing a greasy wallet, fairly crammed with banknotes.

Old Slooger's manner underwent a sudden, though furtive change, as did that of Slosson. Both eyed the pocketbook greedily, and their manner became at once child-like and bland.

"Then you don't know where that pesky boy is?" persisted the countryman, shoving back the wallet into his pocket.

"He certainly hasn't been around here that we know of, has he, Slos?"

"Nit. We don't have much use for minors, anyhow."

"Well, he has been here," asserted the man, coolly. "I heard how he come in here one night, and how you all fit him and took him, and kept what he had. What have you done with the lad?"

"I tell you we haven't got the kid," contended Slooger, uneasily. "We did have him safe enough, I will say that. But he attempted to leave the house one night, and the coppers nabbed him."

"I reckon you mean the police. What could they want of him? That boy is as innocent of wrong-doing as a chicken, by gum! Ha, ha! He hasn't got sense enough to be crooked. But I was afraid something had gone crooked when I got that letter."

"What letter? Blamed if I can make you out at all!" and old Slooger chewed nervously on the end of his cigar.

"Don't know who sent it, but after I got to town, here, it was left at the hash house where I stop. It wasn't signed, but it told me the boy was here, and that you wasn't wishin' him any good. Now, that won't do. I ain't come all the way from Mizoury to see that boy of mine put upon. If Rube comes to any harm, I'll make them as is 'sponsible take a dose of their own medicine. See there!"

The countryman, being by this time somewhat beery in the head, again jerked out his well-stuffed wallet.

"By gum!" said he. "I'll spend a thousand dollars, if necessary, or have that boy back and all he had with him—blame me if I don't."

"That is all right; I will help you through. See?" Old Slooger linked his arm in that of the countryman with an affection quite touching to see, and watched the wallet out of the corners of his eyes. "Dash the coppers, anyhow! I told them that boy was all right, but they clapped the bracelets on him and on my son Steve and sent for the patrol, and me looking on with me two eyes as big as hens' eggs."

"I'll fix them!" asseverated the stranger, waving the wallet. "I'll sue the city for damages. Where can I find a good lawyer?"

"Tell you what we'll do," and old Slooger fairly embraced Mr. Burpee in his disingenuous order, as he greedily watched the wallet. "We will go into the house and talk things over. Ain't Slooger your friend? Bet your sweet life. Won't he see you through? Give us some of that five-year-old whisky, Slosson. Genowine stuff, pardner."

After a drink all around at the house's expense, the countryman was ushered through the back yard into the stuffy, dirty room where we last saw Rube Rawlins.

Then Slosson, going to the side door of the saloon, beckoned inside several tough looking loungers from the street. After whispering a few words with these henchmen, he sent them back to join old Slooger and his new-found comrade.

"Well, now," spoke Slooger, hanging almost affectionately over his guest as the latter sat down on the single bed. "I tell you New York's a tough town. Better let me take care of that wallet, old fel'. I am up to all the dodges here. Some buzzer

will sneak your green. Then—where are you? What d'ye say now?"

"My coin is all right," responded the visitor, looking vaguely uneasy, however, "The man who does me will have to be up early."

Then he yawned, under the effect of his previous potations. As his eyes closed for a second, old Slogger crooked his finger at the open door. Two of the toughs rushed in and slapped a plaster over the countryman's mouth, while two more cast a blanket over his head. He was thrown back and his hands tied securely in a twinkling.

While this went on, Mr. Slogger was leisurely emptying his new friend's pockets, while the latter lay bound, gagged and helpless. The old man began to investigate the wallet. Suddenly he swore a dreadful oath and threw it on the floor, and its contents were scattered in every direction.

"Green goods!" he yelled, while the other men, stooping down, examined the contents in turn and also added their exclamations of disgust.

"The bloke ain't got a dollar of good coin about his clothes. That's the kind of hairpin he is!"

Thrusting his coarse, bloated face into that of the supposed Missourian, old Slogger shouted:

"You ain't no Western greenhorn! You're a fraud. You're working some graft for the police; that is about your size. I kin read ye, and even ye up yet. See?"

The prisoner shook his head. But old Slogger was in a towering passion. He kicked the helpless man a time or two.

"Come on, boys!" he roared. "Pick up them green goods. It's the first time any man ever tried to work that game in the Hole in the Wall. But this feller ain't out of here yet. Where is Meg?" he angrily demanded.

The girl came in from the yard. She eyed the supposed countryman closely for a moment. The blanket had been taken off, though the gag remained, and he was otherwise quite helpless.

"Keep an eye on this chap, Meg!" ordered her father. "Don't let him loose or I will break every bone in your body, d'ye hear?"

Meg, with her arms folded in her apron, nodded, keeping her eye on the stranger. Old Slogger went out, saying:

"Come on, boys, we must see d'e gang about this. There's more in this graft than we kin see yet."

Flinging the helpless prisoner on the bed, they all went out except Meg, who, when the door closed behind them, crossed over to the prisoner's side and looked at him again. She pulled the plaster off and removed his glasses, which were fastened to his head by a string extending behind the ears. As she looked, something about the long, gray beard and mustache attracted her notice.

These she roughly jerked away, revealing harsh, dark, yet handsome features, that bore closely trimmed side-whiskers. A pair of black, restless eyes watched her anxiously now that the glasses had been removed.

"So it is you!" she exclaimed, drawing back. "I thought I noticed something familiar under your make-up."

"Untie my hands, won't you?" entreated the man, assuming an air of affectionate tenderness. "Please, Meg."

"What for, I would like to know?"

"Because I am anxious to leave this place. It don't seem to be healthy for me at present."

"What did you come here for? All that stuff you told the others don't go down with me."

"I came here to see you, Meg."

CHAPTER XII.

MEG SLOOGER ON GUARD.

Meg's full red lip curled incredulously.

"That's a blooming lie, and you know it!" she retorted, at the same time kicking at a counterfeit bill which had been left lying on the floor. "Was you bringing such stuff as that to me? It would be like you. But you can't fool me any longer with your fine tales. I've been jollied enough."

"You don't understand me, Meg."

"Don't I! I think I do, now. But it isn't safe for you to come back here where you've done so much mischief already."

"Is being stuck on your shape doing mischief, Meg? If it is, I cannot help it. Let me loose, Meg dear, and—"

"It was through you that Steve got pinched," interrupted Meg, earnestly. "We know that now."

"Let me loose, I say, and I will explain everything."

"I've had quite enough of you, John Sylvester—"

"H-s-s-h! Not that name here, Meg. Call me Burpee—that is a good little girl."

"Don't chivvy me up any more. I've had enough of all that, I say."

"Well, then, you know what I want. Where is it?"

"Where is what? I'm no witch."

"A witch you have been to my poor heart. You know what I want, Meg. The package I lost when I met you last."

"How should I know where it is? Speak plainer, if you want straight goods from me."

The speaker ground his teeth in ineffectual anger. Then his manner changed again, as he said:

"Now, Meg, you must remember that as I was talking with you—"

"You mean that while you were finding out from me where Steve was, so the cops could lag him. See?"

"No, indeed!" Yet he looked rather guilty as the girl eyed him keenly. "You willfully misunderstand me. But while I was at your window, somebody stole my package."

"It was no bundle of yours, John Sylvester. Wherever it has gone, you will never see it again."

Again his anger got the uppermost, as he exclaimed:

"If I was only loose I would show you whether I can be thus robbed with impunity."

"Yes, but you are hard and fast. More than that, if I was to tell my father how you have treated me, he would beat the life out of you. Then your putting the cops on to Steve for doing your dirty work—"

"Not so loud, Meg, for Heaven's sake!" entreated Sylvester, all at once strangely cowed for some reason. "Have pity on me, Meg dear. I—I am afraid of your father. He may not like it when he finds out who I am."

"Bet your life he won't. He knowed you wasn't no green countryman." Meg spoke contemptuously. "But he found out that you had, as he thought, a good-sized wad, and that was enough for him. If I was to tell him all you have done or tried to do—"

"But you won't. You did like me once, Meg, and you will shrink from splitting on me in that fashion. See! Am I not helpless in your hands?"

"I will tell you what I will do," she returned, eyeing him narrowly, but without a trace of regard. "Remember, first, that the package of money is gone."

"But I shall get hold of it again."

"Well, then, if that is your purpose, I will just let my father settle with you. He knows you are not to be trusted."

"No, no; I will be obedient. I swear I will. Only get me out of this and all shall be as you wish."

Meg rose, unlocked an old trunk, and taking something therefrom, she held it up before Sylvester's eyes. His face became the color of ashes, and his eyes, as he stared, seemed to bulge from their sockets.

"Do you still promise?" she demanded.

"Yes—anything! Merciful Heavens! How did you come by that?"

"Never mind," she replied, placing the object back and relocking the trunk. "I have got it, and I know how to use it should you ever go back on your word with us."

Sylvester was shaking as if from an ague. Meg, bending down, released him from his bonds, whereat he seized her on springing to his feet. She struggled hard, but he was strong and desperate.

"It is my turn now," he hissed. "Give me the key to that trunk. Give it to me, I say!"

But Meg was as supple as an eel. She, too, was also strong. With a deft movement, she twisted herself from his grasp and was at the door in one bound. This she partially opened.

"If I give one scream," she panted, "in come the boys and the old man. They'll do you up in great shape. Make a step this way and I will have them back in a jiffy."

"You are too much for me," he confessed, doggedly. "What must I do, Meg?"

"You must let up on Steve. Whatever he done, he done it for you. You must let that girl, Jennie Coburn, alone. I have heard she is a nice girl, and she is as innocent as some one else is guilty."

"Well, what else?"

He seemed to be slyly edging nearer to her, hat in hand.

"You mustn't trouble my father about anything. That is because he is my father. See?"

"I see, I see. What else?"

Very slowly, but surely, he was drawing still nearer. The girl, absorbed in her thoughts, did not appear to notice.

"You must give up all search for that package. It did not belong to you, anyhow."

"Never!" he exclaimed, his passion getting the better of his discretion. "Do your worst. You cannot prove anything, as it is. I will have what is mine and Steve must take his chances."

As he spoke he sprang upon her with such strength and fury that she was thrown violently to the floor before she could cry out. Sylvester then burst from the room, ran down the steps, through the covered alley and into the street, before Meg's outcries attracted the notice of old Slogger and his henchmen in the bar-room.

When the master of the Hole in the Wall discovered that his prisoner was gone he turned his wrath on his daughter. Meg did not say much, but for a day or two she was seen going about with a black eye and a swelled lip. But then this sort of appearance was not very unusual among the women of that locality.

One afternoon, a few days later, a hump-backed man, with a rag-bag over his shoulder, was staggering up a semi-genteel street on the East Side. He seemed to be either ill or somewhat the worse for liquor.

Presently some young toughs standing about a street corner began to make game of the old fellow, as he paused to steady himself against the lamp-post. They pushed against him. One seized his bag, while another jammed his hat down over his eyes. A third tripped him up and he fell sprawling.

Then the gang retreated, as a woman came to the nearest house-door and looked at the rag man with compassion in her eyes. After a feeble effort or two to rise, he fell back exhausted. The woman could

not stand this, but ran down the steps and assisted the man to his feet. But he sank back, again, groaning as if in pain.

"If I could resh a bit—then—p'raps—could get on," he gasped.

"Poor old fellow!" she exclaimed. "It is a shame the way those roughs acted." She was helping him up the steps and into the house. "Are you, indeed, very sick?"

"Shick—resh a bit," he murmured, as she assisted him to a lounge by the wall, where he appeared to fall into a slumber.

The woman, after a little nervous hesitation, went to her work on a sewing machine in the next room. She sewed busily for some time, then put on her hat and jacket, took up a bundle of garments that were already finished, and went into the other room. She glanced out at the window, yet failed to see a man on the opposite side of the street who was looking at the house as he passed. The old rag man was still asleep.

"Wake up," said she, shaking him roundly. "You ought to be rested, now, and I have to go out. Those rowdies are gone. Wake up!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GENTEEL DODGER'S DODGE.

But no amount of ordinary shaking would waken the old man. His long white hair and beard and deeply wrinkled face still appealed to her pity.

"I just believe I will let him lie," she concluded. "He is yet too exhausted to get up before I return. Then I will give him something to eat and let him go. Some might say I am too soft-hearted, but I guess that ain't so."

She went out as she spoke. The door had hardly closed, however, before the old man sprang up with surprising agility, and began peering into each room in an alert, though noiseless fashion.

"This must be the room," he muttered, as he entered an apartment in the second story by means of a skeleton key. "I must be in a hurry."

The house was a small one and sparsely furnished. The room he was now in looked as if it had not been occupied for several days. There were a bed, two or three chairs, a trunk, a small table with a couple of sporting papers thereon, and another object, on which this singular rag man pounced with avidity.

"This is luck," he muttered, as his eye swept the mantelpiece, on which were scattered a few articles of cheap bric-a-brac. "Now for the trunk. I must take a look in there."

Once more a bunch of skeleton keys were sorted over and used. In another minute he was rummaging through the trunk, tumbling the contents over, which were principally sundry disguises in wearing apparel, together with a few toilet articles and some soiled underclothing.

"Hang it all!" ejaculated the searcher. "It ought certainly to be here. Ha! What can this be?"

He opened a slide in the lid of the trunk and drew forth a folded paper. Then he compared the handwriting in it with that of a letter in his own possession.

"Just as I thought!" he exclaimed; then he breathed a sigh of relief. "Now, I guess I am all right. But time is precious. I must hustle."

After that he rapidly stripped off his gray hair, beard, outer clothing, and his artificial hump. Then he took a hasty wash at a stand in one corner. Diving into his bag he drew out a suit of genteel clothing, including a derby hat, and reclothed himself from head to foot with phenomenal rapidity.

The discarded costume he stuffed into his bag, threw this into the trunk and relocked the same, chuckling quietly as he

did so. Then he pocketed the paper and other objects he had selected, took a look at himself in a mirror on the wall, and finally locked the room door as he went out.

He had gone up-stairs a ragged, disreputable, deformed old man; he came down a slim, straight, well-dressed young fellow, with a fresh face, that was as smooth as a girl's.

Hardly had he reached the lower floor when he heard the rattle of a key in the front door. There was a sound of voices, too. Quick as thought, he darted into a closet under the stairs, pulled the door to until there was only the merest crack between it and the jamb; then he listened.

"I tell you, ma'am, it was no sick old man," said a masculine voice. "The fellow was putting up a job on you. I know what I am talking about."

The young man in the closet smiled as if he recognized the voice.

"He certainly looked and acted as if he were sick," returned the woman of the house, somewhat anxiously. "There he is, now, on the lounge—no, he isn't, either. Where in the world can he be?"

Some explanations ensued, whereupon the man laughed in a sarcastic manner, though it was evident that he was strongly vexed as well.

"The rascal has fooled you, ma'am," he asserted. "He may be up-stairs, now. I will run up there and see."

And up he went two steps at a time. The young man emerged from the closet with a smile on his face. He was such a very young man, hardly more than a boy, it would seem. At sight of him the woman was about to utter a scream, but he motioned to her reassuringly.

"Keep still," he cautioned. "I am all right. Do you know who that fellow is who has just gone up-stairs?"

"He said he was a detective, and that he wanted a poor humpbacked old man, who has somehow disappeared."

"That chap a detective?" sneered the youth. "Well, that is pretty rich! He is masquerading as a detective. Listen!" He placed his lips close to her ear. "You have been deceived. Don't I know him? Isn't he one of that Hole in the Wall gang near here? You had better look out for your spoons and things."

"Goodness me!" cried the woman, hurrying up-stairs and forgetting, in her new alarm, to inquire of her informant how he himself came to be in her closet. "Help! Where are the police?"

"I will go for an officer," called the polite young man, almost bursting with laughter over the easy success of his maneuver.

Then he slipped into the street and walked rapidly away, still chuckling to himself. At the corner was a policeman.

"Run to No. 227 in this block—quick!" urged the youth. "Something wrong there. Don't you hear them calling police?"

The officer, not questioning the reliability of a summons coming from so genteel a person, hastened away, while the youth hurried down another street, nearly choking with renewed laughter.

"If that does not settle Phil McGraw's hash at headquarters, I'm a miserable sinner!" he affirmed to himself. "He has been dogging me long enough. When this gets out, old Sloper will certainly have to put him back to patrol duty again."

Then the young man hailed a street car and rode for a few blocks, descending not far from Broadway and Houston street.

He entered a district city delivery office in the neighborhood of police headquarters.

"Any one been asking for me?" he inquired of a clerk at the desk, at the same time nodding to a number of messengers in waiting on a settee along the wall.

"Yes. It is a fellow from the country,

I think," responded the clerk. "He is over at headquarters in Mulberry Street, now. Look here, Hoke. The manager wants to know when you are coming back to work. He thinks you have laid off long enough."

"Be on hand in a day or two. He can't get on without me. He knows it, and I don't intend that he shall. See?"

After this chaffing retort, the boy detective took himself off to police headquarters. There he found a kindly-looking, elderly man, who was idly inspecting the pictures and other criminal curiosities in the Rogues' Gallery there.

"I suppose you are Nahum Rawlins, of Ball Play, Iowa," suggested Adam, after a shrewd glance at the stranger.

"That is my name," replied the other. "I don't see how you knew me, though. I never saw you before."

"Possibly not. But I am the party who wired you to come on at once, and as my address is apt to be known by parties who are against me in this murder case, I thought it best to have you await me here."

Mr. Rawlins looked at Adam doubtfully.

"That telegram was signed by a detective. Now, you are only a boy. What does it mean, my lad?"

"Ask any of these coppers around here and they will tell you that Adam Hoke—that's yours truly—is an East-Side Spotter, as well as a messenger boy. I have a city permit, and am often allowed to carry a pistol."

"Well, I suppose I must believe what you say. Now, tell me where my nephew is. I did not know I had one until the letter following the telegram came. I ought to look after him, as well as see into the affair of my poor brother's death."

"You have not had much intercourse with the late Eben Rawlins, I suppose?" inquired Adam.

"Hardly any at all for years. My brother did not encourage any intercourse with his relatives. I am a farmer, and don't write much. That is the reason, I guess, that I only heard of Rube's father's death a few days ago. Had I known he was so badly off, I would have been glad to have helped him. But, at all events, I am not too late to befriend his son. Now, where is the poor boy?"

"I am sorry to say, sir, that he is under arrest."

"Under arrest?" Mr. Rawlins was both alarmed and commiserative. "What has the poor child done?"

"I wrote you that he was in trouble, though I did not state just the nature of it. In fact, but for coming across your address among your late brother's papers, I should not have known of you at all."

"I know. But what has poor Rube done? Has he gone and got himself into some scrape?"

"If he did not get himself in, he has been dragged in by others. At any rate, he is behind the bars."

"Lord, Lord! Then it was not for nothing that I've been feeling so uneasy while I was waiting around here for you. It must have been a regular presentiment."

"Must have been, sir. Have 'em myself, sometimes. But, of course, Rube is as innocent as you are."

"Glad to hear you say that. But what on earth have they jailed the poor boy for?"

"For being supposed to be an accessory to the murder of Eben Rawlins!"

CHAPTER XIV.

SERGEANT SLOPER'S VISITOR.

Mr. Nahum Rawlins turned pale with surprise and alarm.

"This is awful," he exclaimed. "Let us go to the boy at once. Poor fellow!"

"Well, this way if you wish to see him

at once. Here comes Sergeant Sloper, who is in charge of the Rawlins case, I believe."

At the door leading to the cell corridors they met this fat, important-looking official. Adam explained who Mr. Rawlins was. The mighty Sloper scowled upon them both. Then he asked some pointed questions as to the death and previous condition of Rube's father, which the Iowa farmer answered as best he could. Then Sergeant Sloper scowled some more.

"I don't believe this yarn," he announced. "An uncle of the boy called on us yesterday. He said he was the only brother of the late Eben Rawlins, and produced what seems to us sufficient evidence that he was telling the truth."

"The only brother!" stuttered the farmer. "Why, there was seven of us boys, all born in Vermont State, though we scattered each for himself. Eben came to this city. Most of us went West. One's a living in Arkansas, and another on the Pacific coast. I have written to them both. The rest are dead."

"What proofs have you got as to the truth of your assertions?"

"Well, I left home in a great hurry, for though I didn't worry much over the telegram, when the letter came I had to hustle. Seemed like I ought to get to my nephew as soon as I could. But I can write back and have plenty of proof here in a few days as to who and what I am."

"Won't do. If you were straight you would have fetched your proofs along. In a few days you may be anywhere but where we want you to be. This uncle had his proofs with him. He says that the boy is a hardened case, and he believes that the lad is undoubtedly guilty of collusion with the other party now under arrest, who is an all-around tough. In fact, the two were taken together."

"Sergeant Sloper," interposed the young detective, "you are laboring under a great mistake. I know what I am talking about—"

"Silence!" ordered the great Sloper, majestically. "I've a notion to run you in, boy. You ran away against my orders the night of the inquest. Seems to me the safest plan would be to lock you both up."

A patrol wagon just then drove up to the door that was near a window where the three were standing, and the boy detective could hardly restrain his laughter at the sight now witnessed below. Sloper looked out and hastened into the corridor.

Outside was Phil McGraw, in plain clothing, being led from the wagon by two big policemen, who were men new on the force, and had failed to recognize the double-faced detective. Phil was letting off a volley of expletives as they urged him up the steps.

Presently Sloper returned, followed by his humiliated protege, whom his chief at once released, with a reprimand to the two officers, and a demand on McGraw to know the meaning of this scene. McGraw was explaining volubly when his eye lighted on the messenger boy, whose face did not entirely conceal his merriment.

"There he is!" cried McGraw, pointing at the boy. "He was the cause of it all. I hope you will have him arrested at once, sir. I will make a charge."

"What in the world have I done now?" demanded Adam, with a child-like assumption of indignant innocence.

"Done? You had me pinched for a sneak thief. Me—a detective!"

"Lock both these men up!" ordered Sloper, none the less enraged at this new charge against the messenger boy because of his being rather puzzled himself.

McGraw sprang forward with alacrity. He was followed by the two policemen, quite willing to make amends for their blunder by arresting the cause of it. The

one whom Adam had met on the street and told to go to No. 227 had recognized the lad at once.

"Hands off!" exclaimed the boy detective, sternly. "Sergeant Sloper, let me have a word with you alone."

"Take the two away," reiterated Sloper. "I won't hear another word."

"Oh, yes, you will," interrupted Adam, pushing away McGraw's detaining hand. "If you don't now, you will be obliged to later on. Your own official credit is at stake. See?"

"No, I do not see. Not by a long ways."

"Perhaps I can assist you by a word or two. You are in charge of the Rawlins murder case. Give me until to-night and I will put the real murderer in your hands."

The sergeant smiled derisively. He knew what he was about.

"We have two of the culprits in charge already."

"I doubt it, sir. You can prove absolutely nothing that amounts to anything against either of the two. But I am in a position to prove every assertion I make, within twelve hours."

"Look here, boy; it is ridiculous for you, a messenger kid, to talk as you do. We are wasting time."

"My plans are all laid, Sergeant Sloper. To-night they will be sprung. Throw away this chance and the real criminal—the one you most want—will escape. I tell you he intends to skip out this very night."

"Stuff! I cannot believe you. What can you know? Boys scarcely out of jackets and knickerbockers ought to be at school yet. If you had stuck to your messenger job you would not be in this scrape."

"I may be a boy, but I am something of a detective as well. If you doubt that, take Phil McGraw aside and ask him. As for this old gentleman, here, he hasn't been in the city five hours."

McGraw ground his teeth as the youth alluded to him, for he realized the truth behind the East Side Spotter's bold statement.

"I will be even with that kid yet," he muttered, in a spiteful aside.

Meanwhile, Sloper, having had time for thought, was really sharp enough to admire the shrewd way by which Adam had turned the tables on his own man. McGraw's words and his vexation were proof enough that the game was nicely played by the boy detective.

"Now, look you here," said the sergeant to Adam. "I will not trust you. You are too slick and slippery. But if you can find surety for a reasonable amount I will let you off until this time to-morrow. Remember—you are now under arrest for ignoring my orders at the inquest, and also on grounds of general suspicion, connected with this murder case."

The messenger boy whispered to Mr. Nahum Rawlins, then asked the sergeant if he would accept the same bond for that gentleman, who was greatly astonished and somewhat alarmed at the recent turn of affairs.

"I guess so," returned Sloper, eyeing Rawlins sternly. "He seems innocent enough, as far as looks go, but looks ain't everything, or you would be at home taking a spanking, my lad."

"Well, then," remarked Adam, indifferently, "I am looking for some one here who will go bail for us both, if necessary, before the nearest magistrate. Let us sit down for a few minutes, Mr. Rawlins."

Adam accordingly seated himself, with a nonchalant air. Sloper went away, as did the others, except only the two prisoners and one of the two policemen, who remained on guard.

The boy detective conferred in a low

tone with the farmer. Iron doors were clanging in the adjacent cell corridors, men in uniform and in plain clothes passed and repassed. One or two prisoners were taken into the chief inspector's office. A poorly-clad woman came in, sat down, and was presently taken into the cell corridor, where doubtless some dear one was waiting for her behind the bars.

At last a thin, melancholy-looking, elderly man came in.

CHAPTER XV.

THE YOUNG SPOTTER'S BONDSMAN.

The stranger looked about, like one familiar with the place. He was followed by Sergeant Sloper, whose air, now one of deference and politeness, was ludicrously unlike his usual self-important manner.

"Hello, Adam!" exclaimed the little, lean man, rather apathetically. "What's up? Got yourself in quod?"

"Looks that way, uncle. But it isn't my fault. When I sent for you to meet me here I didn't think I would have to ask you to put your name on my bail bond."

"Then you know him, I suppose?" cried the surprised sergeant, with an almost subservient manner.

"Know him? Well, rather. He is my own nephew. What is it you want, Adam?"

"Your nephew!" exclaimed Sloper. "Well, that alters things quite materially, sir. I only thought of holding him as a witness for a few days in the Rawlins murder case. But if he will give me his word, in your presence, to report here daily until he is wanted, he can go."

"What say, Ad?" demanded the melancholy-looking man, looking at his watch. "Bless me! it is nearly five o'clock. I ought to be at my club in less than half an hour."

"All right, Uncle George!" returned Adam. "Of course I promise. I have never had any intention of dodging any legal duty, or anything else. Mr. Sloper could not hire me to run away just now."

"Ah, but you ran off slick enough the other night," insisted Sloper, good-humoredly enough, though, now.

"Well, then, is that all you want of me, Adam?" asked his uncle.

The young detective took his relative aside and held a whispered conversation for several moments. The lad spoke earnestly, while his uncle seemed to finally assent, though with reluctance.

"Well, well," said the lean man. "I will think it over. It is a very pretty scheme, but I fear you will spoil all by some indiscreet move."

"Not I, uncle! I'll be as cautious as a hen in the rain. But you have had so much experience—"

"Tut! tut! I say I will think it over. Now I must go. So long!"

And the little lean man drifted out into the street, airily humming a music hall air of the season. Sergeant Sloper slowly wagged his head at Adam and his countenance assumed a look of mild reproach.

"I didn't think you'd let ex-Inspector Bird do me up in that way, Adam. Why didn't you say that he was your uncle?"

"Well," returned the complacent young spotter, "we are on good terms now, I hope. But I think I might as well have the credit of what I have already done as any of you headquarters men."

"No one wants to rob you. But by confiding in us you will get on faster, and have less trouble. That's straight goods, isn't it?"

"Sounds that way. But, I say, can you have at midnight to-night about half a dozen trusty men at a point I will name?"

"Yes, a dozen, if need be. But we must know what you want with them."

"What I want them for they will find

out in due time. They must go to some stables in the rear of Folsom's big lumber yard. Let each man have his pistol ready—"

"Of course. But where is Folsom's yard?"

"Over on the East Side, near—" Adam whispered the exact location in the sergeant's ear, then adding aloud: "There is a password for them to know by whom they are wanted."

"A password! And who should they be wanted by but you? This looks a sort of wild-goose chase, that I hardly like to undertake."

"Well, then, I'll look somewhere else for help. Mind you, though, I am going to land the murderers of old man Rawlins in the Tombs. Fact, old man! If you want to take a hand, now is your time. But I say plainly, I can get all the help I want without any from here. So long!"

"Hold on! You are as fresh as a high school kid. I suppose I will have to humor you, this time."

"You might find it best. 'I wouldn't do for the papers to say that some one else bagged the Rawlins murderers while the 'Centrals' were nosing about in the dark.'"

The sergeant, making a virtue of necessity, acquiesced in Adam's demands. Arrangements were soon made, and the boy detective gave the password.

"It will be 'Rawlins.' Do you tumble to that?" he queried.

"See here!" exclaimed Sloper, still unable to entirely give up his point. "I hope you really know what you are about. I am taking a pretty large responsibility—"

"Ta, ta, sergeant! Like my respected uncle, I, too, am in a hurry now. Will you be there on time? Come, Mr. Rawlins, let us go."

"Well, Hoke, I will have my men on hand." The sergeant surrendered and made a wry face.

When the messenger boy and the uncle from Iowa reached the street the old man rubbed his head in a perplexed way.

"Who do you reckon that other uncle can be that the sergeant spoke of?" he asked. "And what are we going off from here for, without getting my poor nephew Rube out of jail?"

"Well, we couldn't help Rube, just now, if we were to try. It is a serious thing to be juggled for murder, even if there is no proof. Mere suspicion will often keep a fellow in a cell until some one else is under arrest against whom the facts of the case bear stronger."

"As for that other uncle—he is a fake, I feel sure. The guilty ones have cooked up some scheme to thus divert suspicion from themselves and secure a surer chance at the property. At least, this is my idea."

"You are a sharp lad, and no mistake. Looks like you know what you are about. But I hardly like to go off and leave Rube in jail."

"We will have Rube out before long. You trust me. I am the only one who can help your nephew. The other cops are on a false trail."

"That being the case, I guess I had better go along. Then—"

"See that fellow over there?" interrupted Adam, jerking his head in a certain direction. "I think he is dogging us."

CHAPTER XVI.

SPOTTER AGAINST SPOTTER.

A seedy-looking man was following them on the opposite side of the street and a little to the rear. Uncle Nahum gazed at him before he resumed his walk, but when he looked back again the fellow had disappeared.

After dinner, Adam took Mr. Rawlins to his own room, where he made

the old man agree to remain until the young detective's return, which would not be very long off, he averred.

"I have a little running around to do," explained the boy detective. "Then you and I will make ready for our work to-night."

As Adam reached the street again, he saw the same seedy-looking man slip around a corner and vanish. This confirmed a previous impression made on the boy detective's mind.

"I am shadowed again," thought he. "I guess it is one of Sloper's men. Don't know who else it can be. Those Central Office fellows are so suspicious, or jealous—which can it be? I hardly think he can do any harm, now."

In order to avoid being further followed, however, the youth made several puzzling detours before he sprang on a Brooklyn Bridge car. The seedy man was not seen again on the route.

A little later on Adam was seated in the basement dining room of the modest house that fronted upon the little green square. Jennie, who had let him in at the street door, looked somewhat pale and anxious, though she was quite as pert and pretty as ever.

"I am very glad you came," she told him after they had shaken hands.

"That is the way I like to hear you talk," he replied. "Have you any particular news?"

"Mr. John Sylvester was here hardly more than an hour ago."

"Indeed! Well, what did that fellow have to say for himself? I hope he did not threaten or annoy you, Jennie."

"He said that he wanted me to be sure and testify strongly against the boy whom I saw in the hall standing over the body of Mr. Rawlins. He as good as said that if I do not get that boy into it, somehow, he would bring forward proof to show that I was concerned in the murder myself. Isn't he perfectly horrid?"

"Oh, he is up to anything. But don't you weaken, Jennie. He is in a bad way himself. Sloper has got his pal in quod, and he wants your evidence on his side to offset anything the police may sweat out of his pal in villainy."

"And his pal is—not that boy?"

"Nixey! His pal is a far worse specimen—a regular East Side tough. But don't you cotton to Sylvester. He can't turn a wheel, now."

"He is very cunning. You do not know what he is capable of."

"I know what he would like to do, but he is helpless, now. His time has gone by."

"Are you really sure of what you assert?"

"Sure as preaching. John Sylvester is about at the end of his rope."

Jennie smiled cheerily, then her face grew grave again as Adam continued, earnestly:

"Old man Rawlins's murderer will be exposed. Listen! In the first place, I now know pretty surely who did the deed."

"Mercy me! I am glad I don't." She shuddered and leaned forward, eagerly. "Yet I do hope so much that, whoever he is, he will be caught and punished."

"Bet your life he will! Further than this, I know where your employer's money is. It will, I think, be saved."

"That is good. I wish to goodness some of it was mine."

"Perhaps you will be luckier than you suppose. I have run across a late will of the old man's. Your name is mentioned in it, Jennie."

"Mine? You must be joking, Adam. What a wizard you are!" She spoke half-mockingly, as if she doubted the truth of the inference he intended.

"Well, now, perhaps the old man was shrewder than we all thought. You have served him well, and he hated his relatives. Wait and see. You won't be disappointed."

"You talk so wisely that I am almost afraid of you."

"Nonsense! I am your best friend. Yet some people, with whose plans I am interfering, may have reason to feel that I am playing the mischief with them and their work."

Jennie looked exceedingly pleased, and blushed a little.

"Now I must be off," added the young detective, rising. "I merely ran in to let you know there is a better time coming."

He shook her hand cordially and left the house. Then he went through the little square so rapidly that, as he wheeled around a clump of shrubbery, he ran fairly into a man who was evidently peering at the house which Adam had just quitted. The electric light at that point was brilliant, and the boy detective recognized his man at once.

It was the shabby-looking shadower he had seen twice before that evening. The sudden contact with this would-be spy enraged the lad. He seized the man and whirled him around so that his face was fully revealed.

"You're a nice bird!" exclaimed Adam, scornfully, as he released the fellow and stepped back. "I've a notion to punch your head, if you are the biggest. Say! Did Sloper put you on to this job?"

"None of your business, kid," said the other, striking at Adam, who dexterously dodged the blow. "I am on to your game though—"

"Ah—a—a—h! You make me tired—you do! Phil McGraw was bad enough, but you are worse. Say! If I wanted to hire a shadow, d'ye think I'd take you? Say! I'd rather have a wooden Indian from the cigar stand."

"You impudent little devil! I'll teach you manners." But the effort of the enraged detective was in vain.

The East Side Spotter feinted, dodged, ducked, and was off down the path like a bird, so swift and elusive were his movements.

Whipping out of the square, he suddenly darted behind a fire and police alarm box on the curb and watched the shadow-spy look carefully about. But the boy detective was invisible. Then the fellow walked off, shaking his head and seeming otherwise perturbed.

"Now, old soap," muttered Adam, "guess I will do a little shadowing myself. I thought I had you off the track before I took a car. I'll see what you mean by sticking so close to me, and who you report to now that I've given you the slip."

The boy detective now began to dog the shabby man much in the same manner that he had been pursued himself.

CHAPTER XVII.

INVESTIGATING THE FALSE UNCLE.

But Adam was more of a success as a spotter than the unknown detective the lad was now following.

He had the art of keeping the object of his scrutiny in sight without being seen himself down to almost perfection. The color of his clothing was inconspicuous, and being as alert as a cat, Adam managed to avoid notice entirely.

The man, after some preliminary hesitation and looking about, started for the East River water front at a round pace. Soon the dwelling house and retail locality were left behind for dingy warehouses and deserted streets. Even at that early night hour the wholesale regions wore the air as of midnight. A few street lamps at long intervals, and an occasional pedestrian

were about all that interrupted the monotony of desertion.

It was more difficult here to avoid observation, but Adam was equal to the task. When the man looked back the boy was behind a lamp or awning post, or had darted into a doorway. Once a big policeman looked at him suspiciously. Adam boldly asked him for the whereabouts of a certain street nearby. His look of bland inquiry disarmed the officer's mind of curiosity. As he gave the lad the direction, Adam, from the corner of his eye, saw the man he was following turn a water-side corner and disappear.

He darted away as soon as he could do so without attracting the policeman's attention again, and cut across a small-fish market shed that occupied about half a block of the street. This course he took, feeling sure that the man he was shadowing would pass the further end of the market.

Arriving there, he waited behind a closed fish stall for a moment, yet no shabby man appeared. Adam, growing uneasy, anathematized the policeman for the delay he had caused, and ventured forward beyond the market far enough to look along the water front, down which he felt sure that his man would go.

But only a vision of empty pavements was to be seen, except where the lights from a bar-room shone on several loungers on the curb before the saloon doors.

"He must have gone into the saloon," thought the boy. "No other way for him to slip away from here that I can see."

Adam feared to venture into the place lest he should be recognized by the spy. This would have spoiled his plan, which was, if possible, to see where the shabby man went and with whom he was associated.

While the boy detective was reflecting, two men suddenly emerged from the bar-room and turned to the left toward Adam. The boy had just time to spring into a doorway and press himself into a corner as the couple passed.

One was the shabby man. The other looked like a countryman in his garb, but to the youth's keen perception, his manner was that of a city-bred individual. They passed within six feet of the lad, who, as he gazed, felt, intuitively, that he had seen this countryman before.

"What did you lose him for?" angrily demanded the latter, as they slowly passed.

"That kid is as slippery as an eel," replied the shabby man. "I did my best."

"You must find him again, before morning. I say you must. Meantime, I must go and change these duds. I have an appointment—"

That was all Adam could hear as the two passed on. He followed at a safe distance until he saw the couple separate at a corner. Then he kept after the supposed countryman.

"Little of the country do you see," muttered the lad to himself. "If you ain't that false uncle they have been stuffing me about, I'm no peach. But I want to know who you are, and as I can spare a little more time, I think I will try and find out."

The countryman certainly threaded the Brooklyn streets as if he knew very well where he was. Up out of the dingy water-side region he came, and finally took a Bridge car for New York. The boy detective was close behind, and as the countryman went inside the lad leaped on to the rear platform, where he was, fortunately, not disturbed by being told to go inside.

He peered through a window at the object of his curiosity, but could not place the fellow. A heavy beard covered a large portion of the man's face, and a broad-

brimmed hat was drawn well forward, thus further concealing his features.

At the New York end of the Bridge Adam sprang off and followed the countryman skillfully through the crowd down to the Third Avenue elevated station. The two entered the same car and Adam sank into an obscure corner.

When the countryman got out, the boy detective was as close behind as was safe, nor did he lose sight of the man until he saw him enter an up-town house in an aristocratic neighborhood. As Adam saw the fellow let himself in with a latch-key, he muttered:

"A gay countryman you are. About as much one as I am a giraffe."

Then the spotter consulted his watch and found that he could wait there thirty minutes without interfering with his other plans for the night.

"I will do that," he determined. "Something may turn up that will give me a hint as to who this masquerading country chap is. I feel it in my bones that he is the man who is pretending to be Rube's uncle to some folks that will soon see what chumps they have made of themselves."

So Adam ensconced himself in a nook near by, and warily watched; but at the expiration of half an hour no one had appeared from the house into which the supposed countryman had gone, and the young shadower was about to give it up and turn away, feeling that he could spare no more time to this feature of the investigation, when a sharp voice behind him made him start violently.

"What are you doing here, boy?" Adam looked to see a man on the steps of the nearest house surveying him suspiciously.

"I—I was waiting for some one—" began Adam, when, at this instant, the door of the house the lad had been watching opened and a well-dressed, handsome man tripped down the steps and walked rapidly up the street. "There he goes now. See you later, old man."

And off went Adam, in the wake of his human quarry, leaving his unknown interlocutor looking very much surprised. The boy detective was very much surprised himself.

The man before him who was making for the nearest East Side street line, was of a strongly-marked personal appearance. He wore side whiskers. Adam had met him twice and had seen him once. He felt sure that he recognized him now.

"If that isn't John Sylvester, I am a fool!" he ejaculated. "So this is where the false uncle comes in. Wonder if he really took old Sloper in?"

Sylvester boarded a down-town car. The boy detective felt that his case was almost complete.

"Now I must hustle," he thought. "Meg mustn't be kept waiting."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SPY IN THE COAL SHED.

It was about an hour before midnight.

At the Hole in the Wall a general good time seems to be going on. The gang are all there except Steve Slogger. Doubtless Steve would like to be there, but fate and the thick walls of a police cell are, just now, very much in the way of any indulgence on his part in the luxury of individual desires.

His burly, brutal-looking father, however, occupied the seat of honor in that convivial circle. Old Slogger's hard red eyes shine as he jokes with an appreciative knot of listeners around. Seated on an empty beer keg, heated by red liquor, and ever watchful to see that money is kept going over the bar for drinks, he looks like what he is—the evil genius of the place.

Leary Kate and several other hard-look-

ing females are scattered about among the male toughs, though Meg Slogger is not to be seen there. In fact, Meg seldom lingers long in the saloon. Perhaps she finds that the coarse associations are less welcome since her mother's death, a year or so previous to the events recorded in this tale. Meg, besides being buxom and comely, is not without a certain degree of natural refinement.

The side door finally opens and Meg Slogger enters. She goes to the bar and makes Slosson draw her a pitcherful of something hot, strong and fragrant. While this is being done, one of the men seated at an obscure table rises and furtively slips out at the front door. Once outside, however, he whips into the covered alleyway and intercepts the girl as she comes out, closes the side door behind her, and looks around, as if expecting some one then and there.

"Hello, Meg!" whispered the fellow, passing an arm around her waist and giving it a caressing squeeze. "Glad you are on time, sweetness!"

"Turn me loose!" she exclaimed, not angrily, but in a sort of good-natured alarm. "Somebody may be looking or listening."

"Well, they won't see much, out here. As for listening, they will only hear me tell you what a peach you are, Meg. A—a—a—h! If I was only a year or two older I'd be your own young man. D'ye get on to my rig?"

The fellow turned himself about in the half light that streamed through the ground glass of the door.

"My sakes!" she exclaimed. "I never would have known you but for your voice and your—your impudence. For a kid, you're the freshest young geranium I ever met."

"Have to be. If I wasn't fly the girls would give me the dead shake every time."

"That's what I ought to do, I guess. But—Lord! I know when I get a jolly. Say, Adam—"

"H—s—s—t! No names out here, my girl! Let us get out of this. It is too public a place here for yours truly."

They stole across the back yard, and up a few steps. Then Meg ushered her companion into a kind of coal shed at the back of the house, which has been mentioned before as the place from which the disguised Sylvester had escaped. The disguised lad shuddered as he strove to look about.

"This is a rotten hole," he whispered. "How long must I wait?"

"Not long. It's the best I can do for you."

"I suppose that infernal scoundrel has just arrived, Meg?"

"Yep. He's crierly nervous. I have fixed him up a drink, though I'd like to smash his toplights with this pitcher instead. Will you stay her and keep quiet?"

"What else can I do? I haven't got wings to fly off with, have I?"

"By climbing up on the coal you can look through that chink yonder. But make no noise. He's as s'picious as a rat when the cat's about. Mum's the word for you now, whatever you see or hear."

She glided noiselessly away and entered the house by the door on the front or opposite side. The young spy crawled stealthily up on the pile of coal to where a narrow streak of light was darting through a small aperture in the wall, caused doubtless by a settling of the frame of the house.

The plastering inside had also fallen away, and the outsider could peep without difficulty into the same small apartment where Rube and Sylvester had both been detained for short intervals.

Inside now was John Sylvester, dressed

in a neat walking suit, and with his derby hat drawn well down over his handsome, sinister features. Meg Slooger had entered and placed her pitcher on the table.

He moved lightly to the only door of the room, placed his back against it, and faced the girl. "If you utter a single cry, I will kill you, Meg. Don't forget that. Now, where is the money?"

"Money? D'ye think I'm a national bank?"

"I think you know where it is, quite as well as you know what I mean. Come! where is the stuff?"

The spy outside was listening as if his life depended on his catching every word. Meg's lips curled, though her face was pale.

"Will you have patience?"

"Patience! Do you think that when a man has gone to such lengths as I have gone, he will stop short of murder? I have done with patience!"

"Murder!" She eyed him so meaningfully that he grew confused and his gaze sank. "I don't believe you would stop at anything."

"Well, then, you had best be warned in time." He spoke menacingly. "When I was trussed up here the other night I did not fairly realize my power over you. But now I do. Either you will return to me that package of money, or your brother Steve shall sit in the death chair and your father go up for life."

"What for?" Meg pretended to be greatly horrified and astonished.

"For the Rawlins murder. You know me. I am in a position to carry out these things. Come, I say! That money! Where is it, girl?"

"Very well. If nothing else will serve your purpose, I suppose I must give in. But you have done me dirt so often that I hardly know whether to trust you or not."

"Enough of that sort of talk. Where is the stuff, I say?"

"Do you think I am silly enough to keep it here?" she retorted. "Come on! Follow me!"

"If I see a single sign of treachery on your part, I will blow the shallow brains out of your pretty head. Remember that!"

He kept close behind her as she opened the door and passed out. At the side door of the saloon she hesitated, when he whispered:

"No, you don't! I know the cash is not in there, or if it is, and you have fooled me, your days are numbered."

Meg shrugged her shoulders and glided into the street, with Sylvester close beside her, one hand now resting on the pistol in his pocket. At a discreet distance behind followed the spy from the coal shed, who paused a moment to speak to a comrade lurking amid the shadows near the entrance to the saloon.

"All right inside?" asked the spy from the coal shed.

"Right, as drunken fools can be. Little danger of that crowd breaking up. Too much booze!"

"Come on, then! We must keep the girl and the man in sight, no matter what happens."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MESSENGER BOY'S DISCOVERY.

The two shadowers followed Sylvester and his feminine guide for a number of blocks. Meg had hurriedly pinned on a hat and seized a shawl as she left the house. The man had attempted to draw her hand through his arm, but she shrank away.

He was growing uneasy. Once he paused as if about to decline going further, but apparently seemed to think better of it as Meg kept on. At last they found themselves in the region of coal and lumber yards where Artful Adam had been as-

saulted and robbed of the all-important package.

Sylvester's suspicions appeared to increase. The spy still dogged his footsteps.

"There came some fresh fellows into the saloon after you went out," said one of the two shadowers to the other, at the same time looking back uneasily. "Looks like we are being followed ourselves," he added. "I begin to wish I was back in Ioway, Adam. This sort of work don't suit me."

"Hush, Mr. Rawlins! It is mighty quiet about here. You are nervous; that's what's the matter with you. Now, you wait by this wall until I go and get our men. Don't lose sight of Sylvester."

Then the boy detective, for it was he, darted to the rear of a low frame building which stood dark and seemingly unoccupied. The locality was lonely and dreary. At the rear of the structure was a small, square aperture. Inside all was silent and in darkness. Adam, after listening a moment, thrust his head into the opening.

Then he gave the signal in a cautious whisper, as agreed upon with Sergeant Sloper, for these were the stables at the rear of Folsom's lumber yard.

But only continued silence followed. Adam waited a moment.

"Rawlins!" he uttered, in a louder tone, and looked at his watch.

But before he could make out the hour in the gloom, a stealthy step sounded beside him. He attempted to turn, when he received a crushing blow on the head that felled him to the earth.

"Hold on!" he began; then came insensibility, as the lad struggled to regain his feet.

His gurgling cry was quickly answered in different directions. Men rushed forward from behind various piles of lumber upon the lad's assailants, who were two in number. One of them was quickly seized, but the other, by alert dodging, eluded the officers and disappeared amid the lumber piles.

"After him!" called the leader, a small, but active man, and several of his men, bringing forth dark lanterns, started in swift pursuit. "Hello, Adam! Pretty stiff crack, that, wasn't it?"

The boy detective, now recovering, recognized his uncle, the ex-inspector, in the leader of the rescuers. By the same lantern's flame, he also saw in the prisoner, no less a personage than Phil McGraw, the double-faced detective, who looked both alarmed and confused.

"What does this mean?" demanded the spotter. "Where are Meg and Sylvester?" "Easy, now, nephew," replied the little lean man. "My men are scouring the yard and vicinity. If we had been five minutes sooner we might have saved you that knock on the head."

"But I don't understand," began the young detective, rising and drawing his pistol. "Sloper was to have some men in that stable. I came and gave the signal, as agreed upon. Here is Mr. Nahum Rawlins," pointing to that now wondering gentleman, who had drawn near. "He knows. We were to take the main rascal, the master hand in this whole case. Meg was bringing him here."

"Well," explained the ex-inspector, "when I came to think over what a large-sized contract you had taken up, I thought that I had better, perhaps, help you out a little. I don't know anything about your arrangement with Sloper, but instead of remaining at my club, I looked up some of my old men, had you shadowed, and—here we are. Lucky for you we took hold. But here comes that girl with two of my men. Hope they will catch the other one who skipped."

"Where is Sylvester, Meg?" asked Adam, anxiously.

"He and I were standing together down yonder," pointing inside the lumber yard. "I was holding him in conversation until you should show up. He began to twig something was wrong, and swore that if I didn't put him on to the money, he'd do me up then and there. Then that 'other chap,' indicating McGraw, 'came up. They whispered together."

"After that Sylvester turned and knocked me down. Then the two ran away. I suppose that other fellow," pointing at McGraw again, "had shadowed you and caught on to the fact that you were following. Well, I picked meself up, and then your men brought me here."

"Uncle," cried the East Side Spotter, in great excitement, "that chap who ran must be John Sylvester, the very man we are after. He is the arch villain of the whole deal. I am after him. Scatter, all of you."

"Hold on, nephew!" called the ex-inspector, but Adam, pistol in hand, had disappeared amid the lumber piles, after snatching a dark lantern from one of the officers.

Meantime Adam ran on for a minute or two, without any very definite idea as to the course he had best pursue. Then he stopped and closed the slide of his lantern, thus placing himself on the same footing of semi-invisibility as with the man he was after.

The East Side Spotter had made over half the circuit of the yard when he met an officer approaching, with the slide of his lantern open.

"That you, boy?" inquired the policeman.

"Me it is. Why don't you dowse your lantern, officer? If that chap wants to get away you are helping him by showing him where you are."

"Mr. Bird says for you to come on. He wants to leave here."

"You tell my uncle to leave, if he wants to. I am going to find John Sylvester."

The boy detective left the officer and continued his search quietly in the dark.

At the back side of the lumber yard a large coal shed abutted. Adam worked along, slowly feeling and scrutinizing the planking, and occasionally drawing the slide of his lantern in order to inspect some suspicious-looking place.

"Sylvester knows this place," thought Adam. "I found out yesterday that he has an interest in one of these yards. Tonight Meg piloted him this way for us, because she used to meet Sylvester here and knew the place well."

Near the corner of the back wall the spotter came across a short, heavy piece of timber lying on the ground. It was one of the foundations of an exhausted lumber pile, where a number of long boards were lying confusedly together. An idea seized him, and, running to the fence, he pushed against the planking until one of the upright boards yielded to his touch.

Adam held his lantern close. There were the marks visible where the timber had been used as a battering ram to loosen the plank.

"Here is where he got out," decided the lad.

CHAPTER XX.

THE EAST SIDE SPOTTER'S GAME.

Adam closed the lantern slide and listened at the opening, at the same time slipping his pistol into his right-hand coat pocket.

Then he wormed himself through the opening made by pushing aside the plank, and began to explore the coal shed. This was a long, half-open affair, with great piles of coal separated by boarded partitions.

In a far corner was a small brick building, used as an office.

"What does that mean?" asked Adam, breathlessly, as he saw a narrow gleam of light at the bottom of a curtained back window of the office. "I must look into this."

The boy detective stole across the coal yard and peered through the slit of light at the bottom of the window. A yellow linen curtain had been lowered inside, so that Adam could only see a foot or two of the flooring. He could hear a soft tread at intervals, and other subdued sounds, as if some one was engaged busily, though at what task the lad could not imagine.

The spotter hastily examined the two sides of the building that were inside the yard. Only one window was to be seen, but there was a door. Evidently the office opened into the yard, for the great gate was immediately adjoining this door.

The young detective peered at the keyhole, but a key from the inside was in the lock. Over the door was a transom.

"There is my chance," thought the lad.

A box lay under the shed near by. Adam soon had it in place, then mounted quickly and looked boldly through the glass. For a few seconds he watched; then he rubbed his eyes and peered again.

"If this don't beat the world, I never—why, blame it! Who can the fellow be?"

A burly-looking negro was lighting his pipe at a gas burner. There was a desk, stove and several chairs about. The walls were bare and the floor dirty. That was all. And yet—no—what was that which had been hastily shoved under the table?

Adam looked with all his might. It seemed to be a wooden box with a loose lid carelessly thrown across. From one end some clothing protruded.

The darky, after lighting his pipe, looked nervously around.

Suddenly he picked up a scrap of newspaper and threw it out of the window, after crumpling it up in his hands.

The messenger boy quickly descended from his perch, and ran around the office and secured the same. Opening the paper he found sticking to it a mixture of hair and lather, including what had evidently been beard of several weeks' growth.

"Keno!" ejaculated the spotter, dropping the paper. "I am up to your dodges now."

Then he heard the door open and strike his box, which he had forgotten to set aside when he descended. Adam leaped forward, hearing a deep-toned execration and a rattle of the yard gate lock.

Drawing his revolver, he bounded around the corner of the house, only to find himself met with a stern order to halt. Through the gloom the boy detective could see a shadowy form at the gate, with an outstretched arm. He knew the hand belonging to the arm held a pistol that was leveled at himself.

"Halt!" commanded the figure. "Another move and I fire! I know you are the young detective sharp, Adam. Why do you follow me so closely?"

"Because you are badly wanted, John Sylvester. Your game is all up, so you had better give up here and now."

"Give up to a whiffet like you? Take that for your impudence!"

A sharp report, and Adam felt a scorching sensation over his right ear, but he knew he was uninjured. Instantly the lad fired his own pistol three times in rapid succession, then sprang forward and wrenched at the gate, but the wily fugitive, as he fired, had slipped out, relocking the gate behind him.

The boy detective flung himself against the barrier, but in vain, and a pang of disappointment filled his soul.

"I must get out," he exclaimed. "Ah! I have it now!"

Seizing the empty box which he had

stood on, he placed it in the corner where fence and office joined, sprang up, grasped a water pipe, and quickly gained the flat roof of the office. From it he let himself down, then dropped to the ground outside.

As he struck the pavement he heard voices in altercation down the block, and the outlines of struggling figures became visible under the gleam of a nearby street light.

One of the figures fell as Adam hastened up. The other, brandishing a weapon in each hand, burst away and started across the street. The boy detective distinguished the black face and hands of the would-be negro, and raising his own pistol, he fired twice, thus exhausting the weapon.

The man staggered and fell. In a moment Adam was on top of him, when suddenly the lad felt around him two arms that were like bars of iron.

"I'll get even with you," hissed the murderer. "But for you I would have been safe—curse you!"

The boy detective saw something gleam in Sylvester's right hand. The man's revolver had fallen in the first struggle, when Adam strove to free himself.

Though the man was the stronger, the youth was the more active.

Sylvester was trying his best to stab the boy, who now clung to the hand that held the knife with both of his own. Over and over on the pavement they rolled and twisted. At last Adam got Sylvester's thumb in his mouth and as the man cried out in pain, the knife fell from his fingers.

The East Side Spotter still kept hold with his teeth. The other howled louder than ever, but succeeded in drawing up his knees, until he had a strong brace against the boy's body. The man's legs flew out and Adam went with them, landing on his shoulder some half a dozen feet away.

But as Sylvester rose, with his thumb crushed and bleeding, the plucky boy detective arose at the same time. The undaunted boy had picked up the murderer's pistol, and as the man came at him again, he leveled the weapon.

"Halt!" cried the lad. "Another step and you're a goner!"

But as Sylvester, uttering a snarl like a wild beast, made a spring, Adam fired again. The man reeled.

"Curse you!" he exclaimed, thickly. "You are not done with me yet!"

He cast himself upon Adam with surprising energy and bore the lad backward to the ground. His fingers were at the lad's throat. Already lights were dancing through Adam's brain, when all at once Sylvester fell over and lay gasping.

As the spotter sprang to his feet a big policeman came staggering up, with a great gash across his face. They looked at the fallen man.

"Who are you?" demanded the officer of the boy.

The young detective explained, and also told the man who Sylvester was.

"I heard shots," said the policeman. "Then I ran and this fellow met me. We gripped and had a tussle. Then he clouted me on the head with his pistol, or a billy, and ran again. When I came to, you and he were having it hot. Is he dead?"

"No. Lift him up. I believe he is possuming, officer."

Sylvester was raised and handcuffed. Though wounded in two places, he recovered with amazing ease when he found that his adversaries were not to be deceived as to his condition.

"Let us take him to the Hole in the Wall," said Adam. "It is not far, and all the rest of us will be there."

Supporting their prisoner on either side they started.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT THE HOLE IN THE WALL.

When ex-Inspector Bird and his men, together with Mr. Nahum Rawlins and Meg Slooger, arrived at the Hole in the Wall, a patrol wagon was just drawing up at the curb. Sergeant Sloper himself descended therefrom, accompanied by several policemen.

When he heard of Adam's misadventure at the stable window, and the part played by the ex-inspector and his men, he hardly knew what to say.

"One of the men got away?" he asked.

"The very man whom my nephew thinks is chief in this murder," said Bird. "Sylvester himself."

"Pshaw!" The sergeant was incredulous. "Sylvester has been busy helping us to locate the real criminals. He is all right."

Then his eye fell on Phil McGraw, who was still handcuffed.

"What does this mean?" demanded Sloper of his subordinate. "Why were you not on hand at the time and place with your three men?"

"Well, sir," returned McGraw, uneasily. "Sylvester came to me and pumped me. Young Hoke had served me such a dirty trick already that when Sylvester charged him with being conniving and underhanded I thought it a good chance to get even, so I did not take any men. Sylvester and I had made arrangements to have Hoke shadowed. I followed the boy and met Sylvester after he left the girl. When the lad went to the window, Sylvester downed him."

"Hold on!" interrupted ex-Inspector Bird. "Whom have we here?"

Adam and the policeman, with Sylvester staggering between them, now appeared. Meg stood looking quietly on.

"If that is McGraw," exclaimed the lad, as he came up, "I charge him with being one of the accessories to the murder of Eben Rawlins. Here is the main man, however—the chief villain!"

"Good for you, Adam!" commented Mr. Bird. "But now let us go inside. All the exits are guarded. Two of you men guard these prisoners and the girl!"

Therefore in they went and placed old Slooger, Slosson and several of the gang under arrest.

"I told you, Sergeant Sloper, that I would find the murderer of old Mr. Rawlins," said the boy special, whose pistol wound, though slight, had smeared one side of his face with blood. "There he is. He had a tool who helped, but he is the principal."

He indicated Sylvester, who, with the others, had been brought in after the arrests were made in the saloon.

"He lies!" denied Sylvester, though his black face was contorted by pain or emotion.

"That John Sylvester?" asked Sloper, scrutinizing the pretended negro. "Well, well! If he has taken to that disguise, I guess Adam must be right. How did you get him, lad?"

The young East Side Special modestly related the adventures that had culminated in Sylvester's capture.

"Judge for yourselves, men," added Adam. "I have found Eben Rawlins's latest will, bequeathing nearly all he had to his brothers and their heirs. Five hundred apiece are left to Sylvester and to a girl that did his housework, but whom Sylvester tried to implicate in the crime—the dirty dog that he is!"

"A lie—a lie!" muttered Sylvester, feebly.

"Where do you think I found this will?" asked Adam, ignoring Sylvester's protests. "In John Sylvester's own trunk! I also found there the scabbard of the knife that was used in killing Eben Rawlins. The

maker's name is the same on both knife and sheath. I found these in a room where Sylvester had been in the habit of stopping part of the time. McGraw had the room hired for Sylvester. That is where the beauty, Phil, comes in."

McGraw turned very pale at this, but Adam went on.

"I now have it from the landlady herself, that while McGraw, the false detective, hired the room, Sylvester paid the rent. McGraw has been in Sylvester's pay for some time. All this can be readily proved, if necessary."

"I say this is not so," asserted McGraw.

"As for that package of money," continued the boy detective, "I lost it once. But I got it back, thanks to honest Meg, my right bower, and it is now in the care of Mr. Rawlins's lawyer and under seal. I have his receipt."

"Then you did play me for a sucker," cried Sylvester, indignantly glaring at Meg Slooger.

"Yes," added the East Side Spotter. "Meg and I laid a trap for him and he fell into it."

"Curse you!" shouted Sylvester, almost overcome by rage. "If I could get at you for a moment—"

He leaped forward, handcuffed as he was. Adam dodged a powerful blow leveled at him with the man's linked arms. The maddened wretch then clove his way toward the door, until a big policeman grappled him and quickly choked him into obedience.

An ambulance was rung up. At the hospital it was found that the villain, in addition to two serious pistol wounds, had sustained a severe fracture of the skull. He soon thereafter became delirious, and died several days later, raving about the murder.

Enough thus came out to amply substantiate the clues traced out and the proofs obtained by the boy detective.

CHAPTER XXII.

CONCLUSION.

When the ambulance had departed, the prisoners and their guards were taken away in the patrol wagon. The Hole in the Wall was closed up, and two policemen left on watch for the present.

Ex-Inspector Bird, the boy detective and Mr. Nahum Rawlins, together with Meg, went down to headquarters in a carriage. When all were gathered in the chief inspector's private office, young Rube Rawlins and Steve Slooger were brought from their cells.

As uncle and nephew from the West saw each other, both seemed pleased. Mr. Rawlins shook hands heartily with Rube.

"You shall go back home with me, my boy," whispered the uncle. "That is, as soon as this pesky business is settled."

Meanwhile, Adam had disappeared for a moment. Presently he returned with something in his hands, and confronted old Slooger and his son. Steve already showed signs of weakening.

Then Steve was shown the various articles, such as the cigar case, the torn flap, the dagger and its sheath, and lastly a minute fragment of the torn case that had been found under the long finger nail of the dead man.

A deposition was then read to Steve, certifying to the manner, place and time of the discovery of these things.

Lastly, the clothing worn by Steve on the afternoon of the murder was brought out. On the garments were sundry dry blood stains. A medical expert had decided that these stains were those of human blood.

Both Steve and McGraw were, by this time, thoroughly unnerved. They were consigned to separate cells, and in a day

or two both made confessions, the substance of which finally cleared up the mystery of the murder.

Sylvester, as an intimate associate of Eben Rawlins, became possessed of the knowledge that the old man often kept large sums of money in the house. In order to obtain these, he resolved, finally, to make away with his friend, for his financial difficulties had made him desperate. At the same time he intended to steal the will, substitute a forged one in his own favor and thus pave the way for the ultimate enjoyment of all the Rawlins wealth.

Steve proved to be a pliant tool in the attempted accomplishment of all this. It was determined to enter the house by stealth, do their work and escape unseen, if possible.

The day of the crime Sylvester and Steve both came to the house while the old man was absent and Jennie was upstairs.

Steve was to hide in the basement and do the deed. Sylvester, after Steve had gotten away with the plunder, was to exchange wills, by the aid of the old man's safe key (always carried in the old man's pocket); would then call by way of the front door, as was his wont, discover the murder and give the alarm, if Jennie or some one else had not already done so.

But while the two were in the house, and before either Steve had hidden or Sylvester had gone away, Mr. Rawlins suddenly returned. He was in a bad humor. Surprised in the hall, the two rascals were angrily questioned as to the reason of their intrusion. Sylvester saw that they were in a tight place, and gave the signal to Steve to do his part, which the latter did at once, by stabbing the old man in the neck as he sat in a chair by the hat rack.

In his death throes the victim clutched Sylvester's cigar case, which the latter had drawn forth, just as the row began. He rescued the case, but failed to notice the torn-off flap.

After the deed had been thus imprudently precipitated, the pair became panic-stricken. Sylvester managed to open the safe in the old man's room, which was on the ground floor, and to exchange the wills, as he had arranged. But there was hardly any money in the safe, which he relocked and then restored the key to the dead man's pocket. The murderous pair were searching Mr. Rawlins's pockets for the money which they supposed him to have received that day, when a noise in the upper part of the house drove them away. Steve fled by the rear gate, while Sylvester went out at the front.

Phil McGraw was waiting outside. As a detective, he had been taken into the plot, as a means of throwing the police off the track. Later on Sylvester, remembering the common-looking package that Mr. Rawlins had dropped, plucked up courage and went back.

But, on re-entering the house, he discovered it was gone. Later on, seeing the messenger's boy's conference with Jennie on the stairs, he became suspicious, shadowed the boy detective, and obtained the package by knocking Adam down.

Meg had formerly been a sort of sweetheart of Sylvester's, whom he had trifled with and then had neglected. She was easily induced by Adam to cajole Sylvester into visiting her on the night of his intended flight with his plunder, for he had determined to take all and leave his confederates to their fate.

He had the package of money with him. While talking with Meg the package was purloined by Adam. Sylvester's subsequent visit, disguised as Rube Rawlins's

uncle from the country, was to endeavor to regain possession of the money.

On the night of his final capture he had been lured back by Meg under a promise to restore him the money, of which he supposed Steve and others to be still in ignorance. He thought that Meg was still "gone" on him, and would risk almost any danger to retain the hold which he felt sure she believed she still exercised over his affections.

Meg herself had informed the boy detective of the room hired by McGraw for Sylvester, and which was a secret rendezvous for the three conspirators.

When Mr. Nahum Rawlins went back to Iowa he took not only his nephew, Rube, with him, but also Meg. Meg's father and brother both went to the "pen," and the Hole in the Wall was closed. The kind-hearted farmer felt sorry for the unfortunate girl, and as he had benefited in a substantial way through his brother's will, which the East Side Spotter found in Sylvester's trunk, he easily persuaded her to bid farewell to her miserable city life and try her fortune in the country. Two years later she married an industrious Iowa farmer. A wholly changed woman she was, and one well worthy of the respect which she commanded.

Jennie, by reason of her being remembered in the will of Eben Rawlins, had no reason to complain of the final turn of fortune's wheel. She regards young Hoke as the greatest of detectives, and still delights in telling her friends how Adam ran down the Rawlins murderers, while the Central officers were at a loss for a true trail.

When the East Side Spotter finally returned to the city delivery office, he was quite a hero in the eyes of the other boys, notwithstanding the fact that he was mildly reprimanded by the manager for his long absence from duty.

"I think I ought to discharge you, Adam," said that gentleman. "What have you been up to so long?"

"Making this, sir," and the bright-eyed spotter unfolded twenty-five brand new twenty-dollar bills. "Doesn't that beat rushing messages at four dollars a week, sir?"

Then he told what he had been at, though it was safe to say that the manager was the only one in the office who had not heard of Adam's connection with the Rawlins murder case.

"Sharp boy!" chuckled the manager. "Why did you not let me know what you were up to before? My brother belongs to the Pinkertons. Assistant manager of their New York office, he is. I think he can make room for such a lad as you are, Adam."

"Nothing would please me better, sir. It is in my line, I guess."

The manager laughed and patted the lad's shoulder.

"I should think you would be worth at least twenty dollars a week to them, besides pickings—eh?"

And the East Side Spotter went out and hugged himself at his good fortune.

THE END.

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